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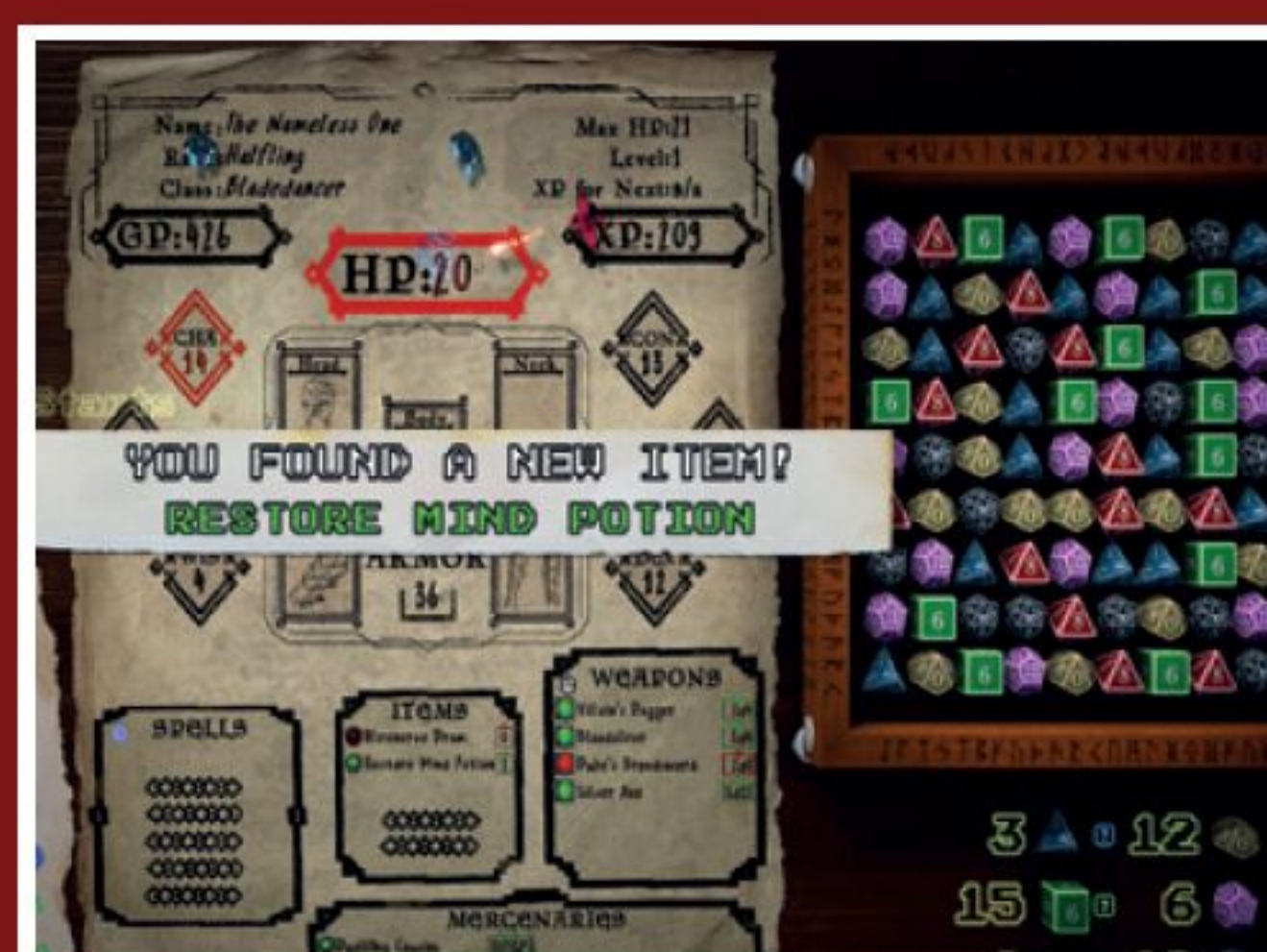
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FUSION

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CROSSOVER: ROLL FOR INITIATIVE

EXCLUSIVE
PREVIEW OF
THE NEW GAME
PUBLISHED BY
MICROPROSE



RIDGE RACER TYPE 4

WE LOOK BACK
AT THE STUNNING
FOURTH ENTRY IN
NAMCO'S CLASSIC
RACING SERIES ON
THE PLAYSTATION



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Publisher
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At some point during the ZZAP! Live event, I lost track of all the new people I'd met and started forgetting people's names. Whether I was helping set up on Friday or riding the wave of the event on Saturday, there was a constant stream of smiling faces and conversation. The atmosphere was electric, and I felt grateful to be part of something so positive. Usually, I'm not phased when I meet well-known or "famous" people, but I must admit that I was a little starstruck when I briefly spoke to Andrew Braybrook. You can find Faith Johnson's report on the event on page 8; however, I don't think I'm giving anything away by saying it was a huge success.

Joining our event report this month is another eclectic mix of articles from an eclectic mix of gamers. Join us for reviews of *Rise of the Triad: Ludicrous Edition*, *EX-Zodiac*, *Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons*, and *Metal: Hellsinger*. Andrew Fisher brings us an exclusive preview of *Crossover: Roll For Initiative*, and we have a double bill of retrospectives for you this month, one by land and one by sea. George Sturgeon takes on another belligerent boss for us and lives to tell the tale before traversing another finely crafted Super Stage. And, of course, there is more, but I'll let you find that yourself. Thank you for supporting FUSION, and I hope you enjoy this issue of our little games mag.

MISSION START!



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FUSION Issue 48

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RISE OF THE TRIAD

LUDICROUS EDITION

■ Nostalgia is a funny thing, especially when it comes to games from decades past. Nightdive Studios has a stellar reputation for bringing past classics to modern-day hardware and audiences, but it's hard to deny that game design has changed a lot over the years. All this puts me in a quandary over *Rise of the Triad: Ludicrous Edition*.

With its development beginning as *Wolfenstein II* using a modified version of the original *Wolfenstein 3D* engine, *Rise of the Triad* wasn't exactly cutting edge when first released in 1995. *DOOM* was the king of the hill, and *Quake* was only a year out. However, the mix of story and over-the-top gore made *Rise of the Triad* a firm favourite for many, and the subsequent 2013

remake proved popular. Now, it's back again.

As stories go, this is pretty run of the mill - tackle a dangerous cult, try to survive the traps and other environmental hazards, and generally shoot everything that moves. Even if it doesn't move, shoot it anyway, as some of those bodies are sneaky cultists playing possum. With the new *Ludicrous Edition*, you get the full works: five playable characters, all original episodes, and a new one created specifically for this release. There is also a mix of soundtracks (the 1995 original, 2013 remake, and a jukebox), multi-player modes, a level editor, and quality-of-life improvements for displays, controllers, etc. It's hard to complain about the value on offer here.

Of course, being a shooter, the enjoyment is in the gunplay, and it's mostly a fun experience if you're using a mouse and keyboard. However, the new controller option is a tad more skittish.



WORDS BY ANDREW OYSTON

Autorun is enabled by default and toggled via the options menu, making the navigation of platforms annoyingly tricky. But, with autorun turned off, you'll likely miss out on collectables, or sometimes take unnecessary damage.

Rise of the Triad comes from a time before autosaves, meaning you'll be spamming the F6 key to quicksave because death can and will come quickly, especially on the higher difficulty levels. And when they say difficult - they mean difficult. Was this game really that tough back then? Other callbacks include level layouts that become so confusing that the auto-map becomes essential. Oh, and getting stuck on scenery - how 90s. On the presentation side of things,



Above: Switch autorun off. Trust me on this.



Above: Is it me, or is it a little crowded in here?

ROCKETMAN



BAZOOKA

Your standard rocket launcher. Just point and shoot, then wait for the body parts to start flying.

FIREBOMB

A step up in firepower, this launches a line of flames that spreads out in front of you. Expect your targets to stand as ash figures for a second before collapsing.



SPLIT MISSILE

Double the Rockets, double the fun. Useful for firing into crowds of enemies. Just don't be too close when you pull the trigger.

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Above: Don't trust him. That's all I'm saying.

the sound is spot on, with some period-quality speech and the same cracking mix of tunes to serenade you as you go full gibbs on the bad guys. The graphics raise a concern or two; you have an adjustable field of view and 4K support, but the 3D itself is of its time, and the warping is noticeable and disconcerting enough to make play uncomfortable. As for Shrooms mode, that made me feel nauseous. It does, however, move at a fair pace, even on the most modest of hardware. And yes, it's gory - the odd eyeball dropping in front of you after a particularly messy explosion is both neat and another sign that this

is a game of its time. The shock value of ludicrous gibbs in 2023 is much diminished compared to the 90s original, although the gallows humour of the various quit screens still amuses.

I am very much torn with this remake. It adds every bell and whistle you could want in a *Rise of the Triad* release, and the level of polish from Night-dive is exemplary. The issue is that this game is a mid-90s shooter, and that particular format has aged poorly over

the last three decades. Great fun in short bursts but rather tedious if you spend several hours with it; *Rise of the Triad: Ludicrous Edition* is an excellent game if you're a fan of the genre and period. Your mileage will decrease significantly if you've moved on from that era. My score for *Rise of the Triad* is for the occasional fan or newcomer. Add two points if the original was a favourite. ■

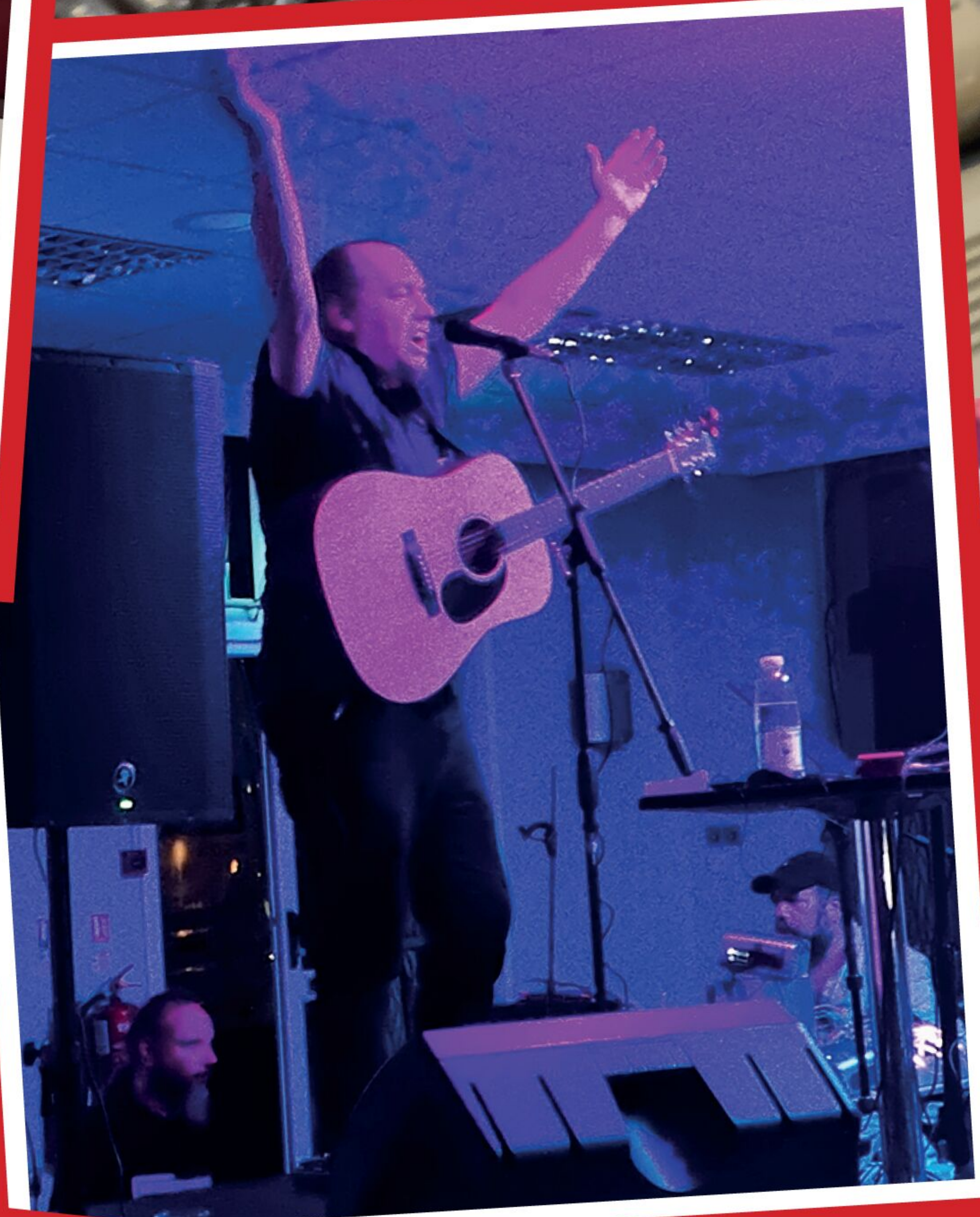


YOU'VE WON THE BATTLE, HUNT, BUT
WHEN THE OSCURIDOS RETURN, WILL
YOU BE READY AS THEY WAGE THEIR
DARK WAR?



AP LIVE! 2023





FAITH JOHNSON REPORTS FROM THE FRONT LINES OF THE COMMODORE ARMY ON MANOEUVRES IN KENILWORTH!

Hundreds of Commodore fans descended on The Holiday Inn in Kenilworth on Saturday, 12th August, for ZZAP! Live 2023. Organised by our very own Chris Wilkins in collaboration with Revival Retro Events, the one-day extravaganza was filled to the brim with Commodore 64s, Amigas, and other exhibits, as well as a host of guests that told their stories through a barrage of Q&As.

The sold-out event was packed with attendees from the 10 AM start right through to the evening entertainment that finished way past midnight. It took over the entirety of the venue, and there were three main rooms that each had its own function. These rooms were connected by a long corridor lined with arcade machines

and some non-Commodore consoles. The front area was the Amiga room, filled with Amigas of all types, from original machines to heavily modded systems.

The smallest area was where the daytime guest panels took place in Q&A-style talks. The third and largest room was the Commodore room which housed every type of computer from Commodore's vast range. This room was transformed in the evening to host the final panel, followed by some live music acts.

There was a real sense of community throughout the day, and a hive of activity was around every turn as friends reminisced over their favourite Commodore memories and discussed the vibrant indie and homebrew scene that continues to this day. It wasn't just fans buzzing about the venue; many developer legends such as Andrew Braybrook, Jon Hare, and Stephen Thompson were on hand to chat with fans over a pint and a game.

The event was set up brilliantly, and there was always something to do or see due to the number of different exhibits and vendors. It was great to see queues forming to play some of the



more unique machines on display. For those needing a pause or respite, the bar area was on hand and was an excellent destination for those looking to catch up or meet new friends.

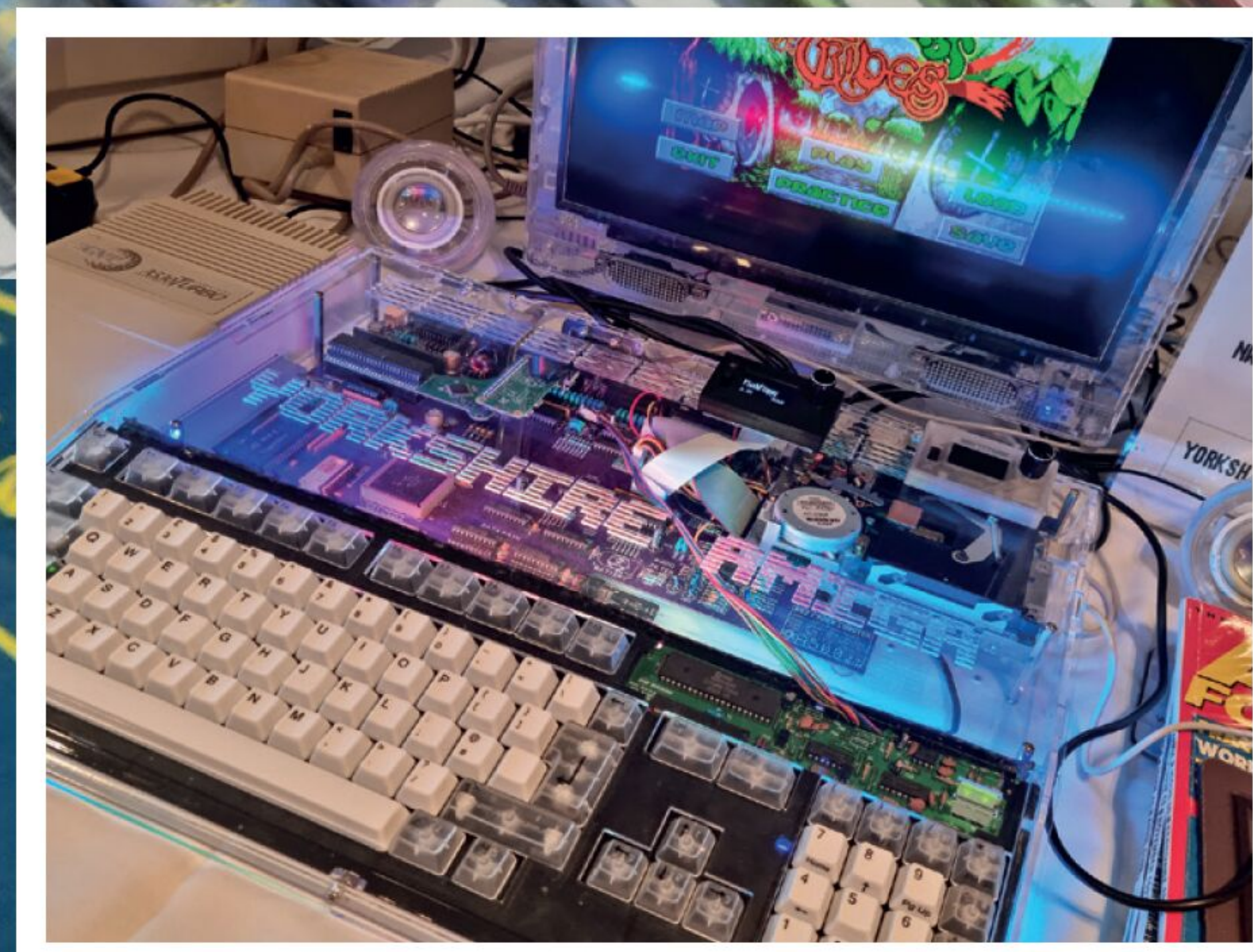
The panel quests also proved popular as the room was constantly filled with eager fans trying to get a seat to listen to their hero's stories. Each panel featured well-known Commodore developers from the early C64 years to the Amiga. Writing about every guest or panel would be too much, but the highlights included Simon Butler giving us the truth about Ocean Software's inner workings, which was both funny and eye-opening; Andy Davidson discussed how he came up with the idea for Worms and his chance meeting with Team 17 that sparked his career; and shooter god Jeff Minter gave a talk on his career and showed a new film about his life and work.

In the evening, once the hardworking event team transformed the main hall, attendees could see the day's final guest panel. It focused on Commodore music new and old, and even had Barry Leitch appear via a video call from the USA. Once the talk concluded, attendees were treated to a special live performance from Jon

Hare, who played some of his Sensible Software music on his guitar, along with some original songs. Jon was followed by Mark Knight, known as TDK, who also performed his music live via the violin and synth. The performance was concluded with a DJ set featuring chiptunes as the event finally began to wind down.

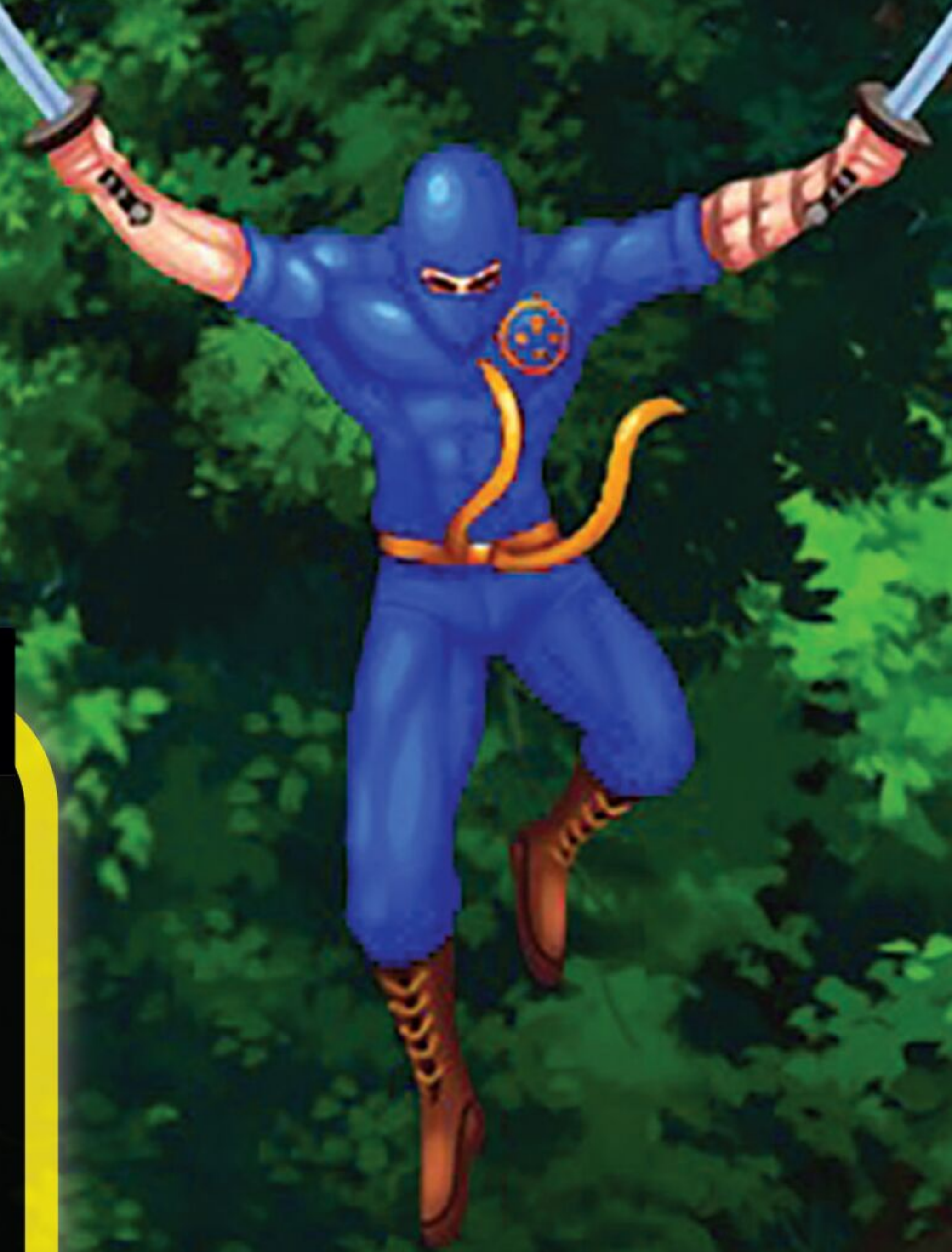
You could tell from the smiles on people's faces and the electric atmosphere throughout the day that ZZAP! Live 2023 was a huge success. The venue was terrific and allowed everyone who came to enjoy some classic Commodore hardware and software, alongside the opportunity to meet some real legends of the scene, past and present. Many attendees were already asking when the next ZZAP! Live will take place long before the first event was over!

We must give huge congratulations to Chris and the team for such a fantastic day. Everyone worked hard to ensure the event was fun, entertaining, and ran smoothly. The new venue has set a blueprint for more FUSION Retro Events, and the future looks bright for the UK Commodore scene with ZZAP! Live the calendar highlight to look forward to. ■





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Game : **Shadow Gangs**

Year : **2020**

System : **PC, PS4/5, Xbox One/Series, Switch**

Words : **Marc Jowett**

■ *Shadow Gangs* is a side-scrolling action game that takes inspiration from *Shinobi* and sees you battling waves of enemies while rescuing hostages. Rescue all the hostages, and the level is complete. Did I mention that enemies respawn and that there is a time limit as well? *Shadow Gangs* is one tough test, even on the easiest setting, but a rewarding one.

You play as a ninja master named Dan and begin each level with a paltry set of shurikens. The aim is to quickly pick up a ninja suit which gives you access to guns and special power-ups such as mines and magical powers. Trust me, you will need them!

Enemies act true to life, meaning that an enemy with a gun has to stop and reload once in a while, giving you a chance to strike. They also come from all angles, leaping off boats and out from buildings. In *Shadow Gangs*, there is no let-up. This isn't a mere run-and-gun game; more a game of cat-and-mouse while the timer laughs at you.

Considering the number of enemies that often adorn the screen, it all runs remarkably smoothly, and the hand-drawn visuals are gorgeous. *Shadow Gangs* took a lot of time and money to develop, but JKM Corp has done an amazing job. If you haven't checked it out yet, it is well worth doing so, although the difficulty may put off the more casual gamer. ■

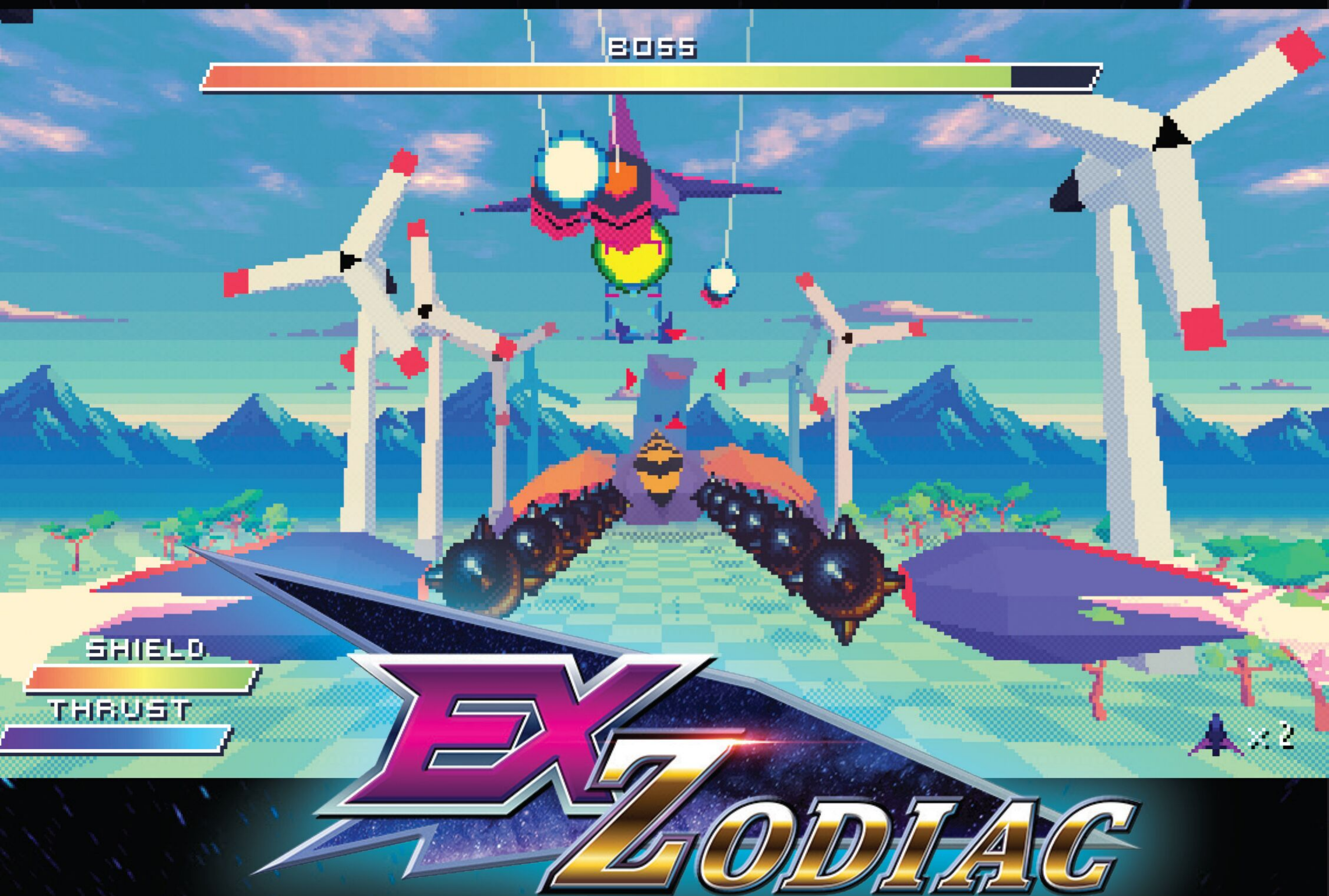


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FAITH JOHNSON CASTS HER CRITICAL EYE OVER THIS RETRO-THEMED SHOOT-'EM-UP.

Like many indie games these days, *Ex-Zodiac* started life as a hopeful Kickstarter. The developers pitched the game as a “fast-paced rail shooter with a stylised look reminiscent of early 90s 3D games”, and backers jumped at the chance. The campaign was funded in July 2020, and development has finally ended, first as a playable demo and now as a fully-fledged game. The initial impression when firing up *Ex-Zodiac* is that it’s a simple Starwing clone with a few modern graphical touches. But scratch under the surface, and there is more to this low-poly homage to early 3D games.

We should start with the obligatory paper-thin story that serves little purpose other than to set a premise. Protagonist Kyuu is fighting to free the planets of the Sanzaru Star System, overrun by an intergalactic terrorist organisation known as the Zodiac. That’s pretty much all there is to it, but nobody plays shooters for an engaging story. These games live and die on their gameplay, so the lack of story is actually a good thing with *Ex-Zodiac* – it allows us to focus on the mechanics, visuals, sounds, and overall longevity of this no-nonsense shooter.

All six of *Ex-Zodiac*’s levels follow the same pattern of frenzied shooter action, culminating with a tough boss. You also have the chance to find a secret data card in each level that grants access to a *Space Harrier*-inspired bonus stage, and the main draw is trying to achieve a high ranking. Each time you complete a level, you’ll be rated by your score, enemies destroyed, time



taken to kill the boss, and how many lives you used. It's tough to score the high ranks, and it all comes down to remembering where and when the enemies will appear.

There are also secrets to uncover that grant more powerful weapons and extra bombs that are crucial to taking the bosses down quickly. *Ex-Zodiac's* strong point is its simplicity, which allows you to focus on improving your game and is amplified by the intuitive controls. A simple fire mechanic can be mashed or held down to

target enemies with missiles. You can fire bombs to clear the screen, and a thrust move helps to blast past falling buildings. The left and right triggers control barrel rolls and shifting your craft on its side.

There are three different types of craft, with the most fun being the spaceship used for most levels. Another craft is a Tron-style motorbike with mounted cannons that is less fun but adds some variety to the gameplay. The final form is used in bonus rounds: Kyuu with a rocket



pack and blaster. Each form has its strengths and weaknesses; however, there's no switching between forms during levels, which feels like a missed opportunity to add more variety to the stages.

There are also a few issues with the controls, leading to frustration in an otherwise excellent game. Other times, your craft will suddenly slow down and not feel as responsive, leading to cheap hits, ultimately harming your score. This isn't a huge problem, though, and will hopefully be ironed out with patches, but it is noticeable. Another issue is not being able to see all the projectiles coming at you, especially with enemy-filled screens. Also, the bombs are hard to use with no way to aim them, and it feels more like luck than judgement when you actually manage to strike a successful blow.

Visually, *Ex-Zodiac* looks lovely, and each location has a distinct theme. No two levels feel alike, and even the bonus stages have a unique setting. Each stage also has its own enemies, such as flying fish creatures for the water level and rock-like enemies for the asteroid field. There is also a lack of textures, and while this may seem like an odd omission at first, it gives the game a look that helps it to stand out. The block-like feel works well with the fast-paced nature of the gameplay and creates a clear path through the vibrant levels.

The soundtrack does its job well but feels dated as it harks back to the games *Ex-Zodiac* is paying homage to. Fans of retro-inspired games will enjoy it more than those looking for fresh sounds, but there is quality to be found in places. The way the tempo jumps up and down as the levels progress and the boss appears is well implemented, and each level does have a distinct track. Conversely, the sound effects for weapons



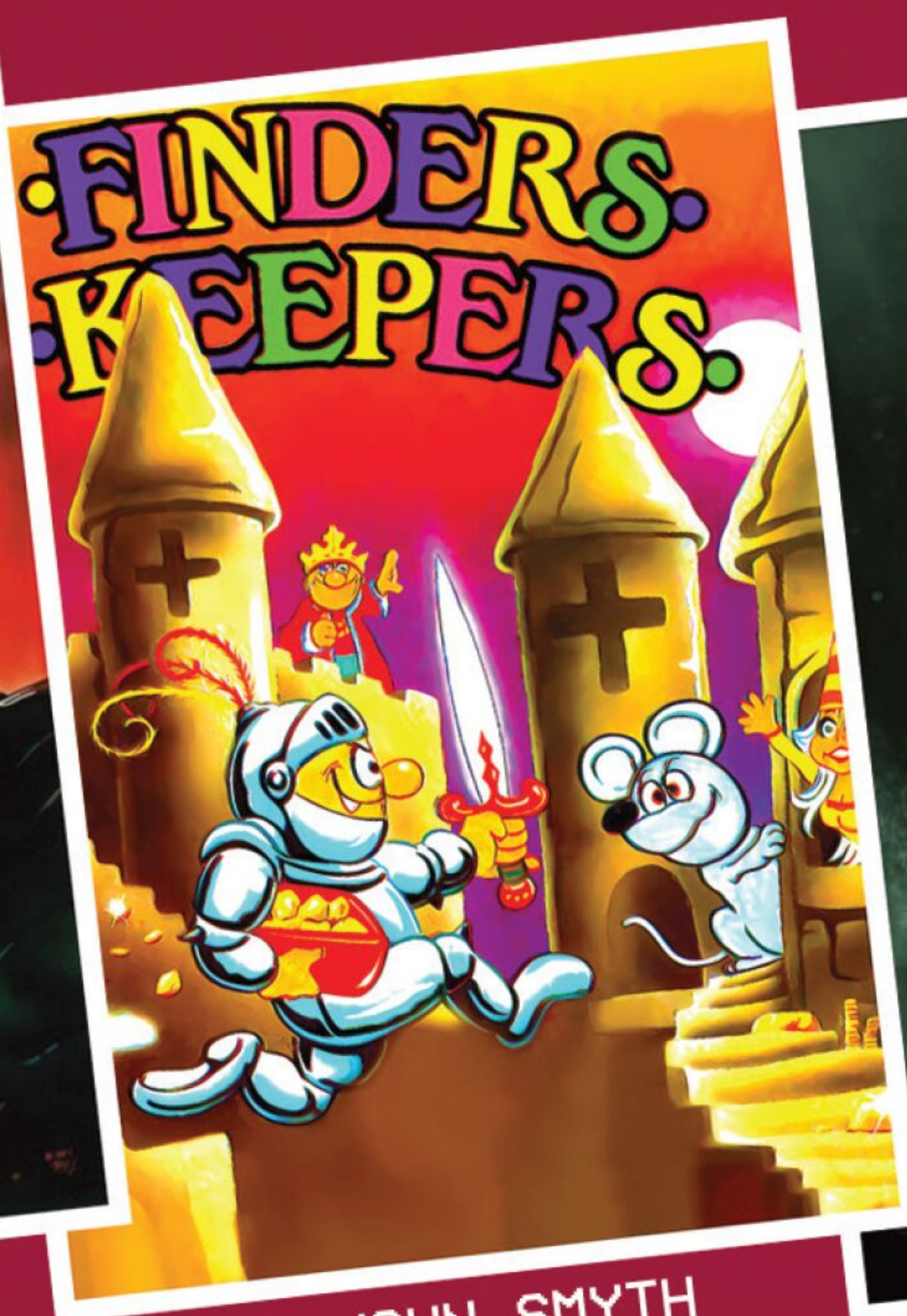
and enemies are flat and muddy at times, as are the explosions of defeated bosses. This is disappointing as it fails to create a grander feel to the battle.

Overall, *Ex-Zodiac* is a competent shooter that pays homage to classic rail shooters with dollops of modern touches. Its smooth framerate, simple gameplay, and distinct visuals create an enjoyable, short-lived experience. It's not perfect; a few control niggles do pop here and there, and getting the top ranks can feel more like luck than skill at times. Yet fans of the genre will want to check this out, and there's a promise of six more levels as an update rather than DLC. ■





OLIVER FREY



JOHN SMYTH



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SUPER STAGERS

GEORGE STURGEON BURROWS HIS WAY THROUGH MELON MADNESS FROM *NEW SUPER LUCKY'S TALE* AND TELLS US WHY THIS FRUIT-FILLED PLATFORMING LEVEL EARNS ITS SPOT AS A SUPER STAGE.

Developed by Playful Studios, *New Super Lucky's Tale* is an unapologetically jolly playground platforming adventure that takes the studio's previous game, *Super Lucky's Tale*, and reworks everything. The opportunity

to create this ambitious remake arose during a meeting between Playful Studios and Nintendo, where the Playful team showed Nintendo an early playable prototype of their Xbox One title, *Super Lucky's Tale*, running on the Nintendo Switch.

Through further discussion, Nintendo and Playful agreed that fully reimagining the game would be the perfect way to bring it to the new console and introduce Lucky to new audiences. With updated camera controls, tweaks to the





Super Stage: Melon Madness
Game: New Super Lucky's Tale
Developer: Playful Studios
Year: 2020
System: PC, Switch, Xbox One/Series, PS5/4 (played)

Above: Lucky's diving and burrowing skills are simple and satisfying to use.

storytelling, and revisions to its core level designs, the eventual remake wonderfully retells the story of Lucky Swifttail as he sets out to reclaim the magical Book of Ages from the claws of Jinx and the Kitty Litter, a villainous clowder of cats.

Melon Madness earns its position as a Super Stage for its combination of great characters and impressive technical design that one would expect to find in a 90's mascot-era platformer, but this time, complete with the enhancements offered by modern consoles.

Newcomers will be impressed with the strong cast of characters, and those who played the original version of the game back on the Xbox One will notice the results of the technical improvements made to this new version. Our main character, Lucky, appears more expressive,



Above: There are four Book of Ages pages to find across the stage.

curious, and charming than ever, whilst his controls and reactions are quicker and more refined, so picking up this playful platformer feels great from the start.

Gameplay styles within *New Super Lucky's Tale* vary from level to level and offer a mixture of 2D and 3D stages. Its two-dimensional side-scrolling levels were built as a "technical contrast" to the open 3D explorative maps, adding more of a retro-style platforming

challenge to this otherwise easy-going adventure. In this stage, Melon Madness, the player can find one of the game's best examples of the lively sense of character and cleverly reworked level design that allows the simplistic controls to shine.

With many classic platformers having made comebacks in recent years, *New Super Lucky's Tale* stands as a wonderful update of Playful

Studios' original Xbox One title, and a joyful jaunt through Melon Madness only further cements its place as a welcomed addition alongside the platforming paragons that inspired it.

The stage goal of Melon Madness is for the player, as the fox, Lucky Swifttail, to navigate the fruit path ahead of them as they complete various objectives on their quest to collect lost pages from the Book of Ages.



Above: Skill is required to keep Lucky balanced on the giant watermelon as it rolls through the stage.

LEVEL DESIGN

Melon Madness is a two-dimensional side-scrolling stage centred around traditional run-and-jump platforming with a tremendous canyon-style backdrop. On entering this stage, the player will no doubt take note of the vivid pink, green, and orange colours that give this level a rich and fruity flavour to its visuals, immediately evoking the same vibrant and cheerful feeling of many a PlayStation 2 platformer back in the day.

With this awesome environment to navigate,

the player character 'Lucky' feels perfectly at home. Its challenges require this joyful fox to run, jump, and burrow through the ground (or, rather, the insides of giant watermelons). It's a simple set of controls which allow for some fluid gameplay. With minimal practice, the player will feel confident diving in and out of obstacles; even the hardest challenges should feel achievable.

The player's main path throughout Melon Madness may appear to be a straightforward platformer, but no adventure like this would be complete without its fair share of collectables. Lucky's goal is, of course, to reassemble the Book of Ages; to do this, four objectives must be completed. These include getting your paws on at least 300 coins worth of cash, locating a secret page hidden within the stage, gathering up all of the five "Lucky" letters littered around the level, and finally, simply reaching the end will reward you with the final page.

GRAB-BIT

Whether you're perfecting control of Lucky's signature burrowing ability to gracefully

navigate obstacles, keeping your balance atop a giant rolling watermelon, or simply appreciating how Lucky's silhouette remains visible when travelling through scenery, there is always something that will leave a lasting impression.



Above: Lucky's tail swipe can be used to flip switches.

On the enemy side, it's important to point out that the Kitty Litter themselves do not appear in this stage. Attempting to slow your progress, however, are several bees that will fire projectiles toward Lucky. These bees can quickly be dispatched by a swipe of Lucky's swift tail or by jumping on them if the opportunity presents itself.

The real challenges here are the environmental hazards and obstacles that will test the player's platforming mettle. Between making calculated leaps through sawblades and rising platforms, burrowing through giant watermelons, and tail-swiping enemies out of their way, the level design and obstacle placements stood out for their sheer inventiveness. The intuitive controls will allow seasoned players to unravel the brilliant connectivity between each move in Lucky's simple skillset and how they can be linked together for fruitful and stylish results.

To accompany this level is a jazzy soundtrack aptly named 'Melon Madness'. Its catchy melody integrating saxophone, xylophone, and guitar is a pleasantly uplifting track like many in *New Super Lucky's Tale*.

When you consider that the developers at Playful Studios grew up playing platformers like *Super Mario*, *Spyro the Dragon*, and *Sonic the Hedgehog*, it's clear that the seeds for a level like Melon Madness were already planted. Boasting dramatic changes and additions to its level design and topped off with beautiful new visuals, the quality of this platforming stage should not be understated.

Melon Madness is what you get when you put a development team's technical know-how, a passion for charming retro platformers, and a great idea into a blender. No, the outcome wasn't a fruit smoothie, but something even better – a Super Stage we're 'Lucky' to have. ■

PAUL TWIST IS SPOILING FOR A FIGHT.

■ If you've read my piece in last year's **FUSION** Annual, you'll know I firmly believe that the side-scrolling beat 'em-up has been undergoing something of a renaissance in recent years. So, it is with open arms (and fists) that I welcome a new entry in one of the genre's best-loved franchises. What's more, as a magazine that fully embraces retro while also celebrating the new, this latest instalment in the long-running *Double Dragon* series should be right up our street.

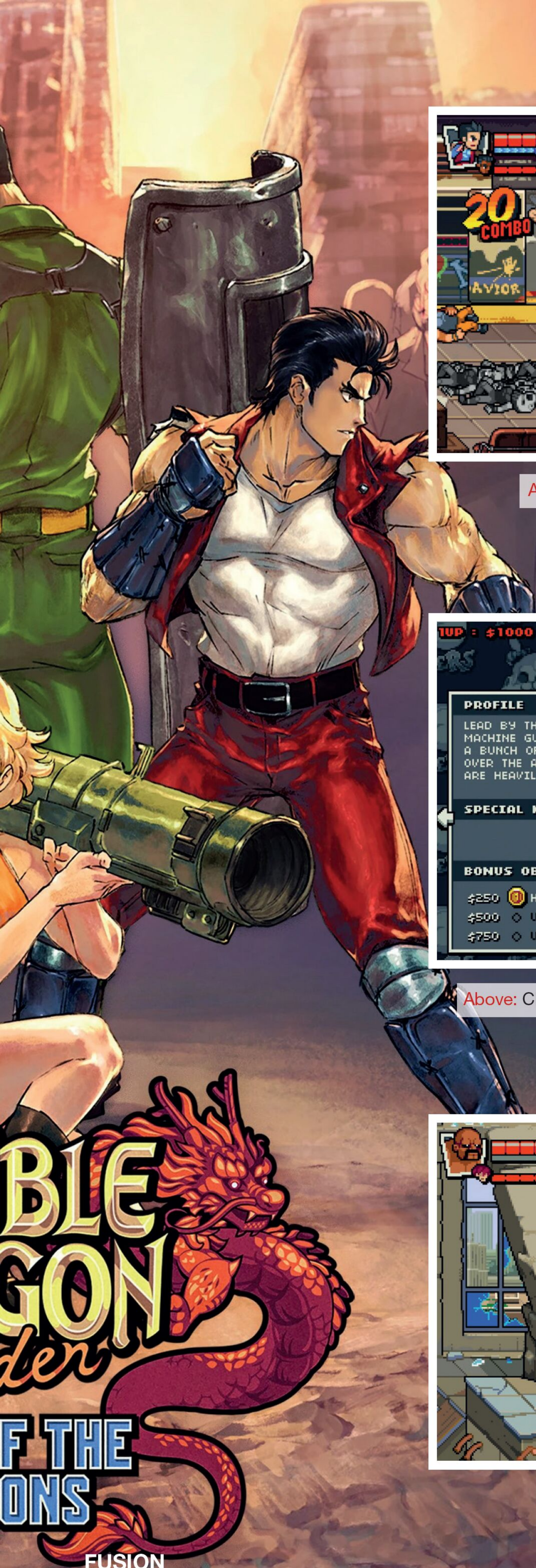
Even though *Double Dragon* never became a household name to the same extent as *Streets of Rage* or *Street Fighter*, the series has a long history. *Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons* isn't the first time *Double Dragon* has been revamped. The first two attempts to drag it punching and kicking into the modern era were 2012's stylish but forgettable *Double Dragon Neon* and 2017's *Double Dragon IV*, which saw a return to the game's retro roots. So, how does the lengthily-titled third reboot measure up?

Double Dragon Gaiden does a lot right. It looks, sounds, and feels like a *Double Dragon* game. Pixel art graphics depict the gangs of ruffians, complemented by arcade-like sampled speech, not to mention its traditional setting in the year '19XX'. I admire the franchise sticking to its original period, much like the futuristic sci-fi comic 2000 AD, which retains its title even though it refers to a year over two decades ago. However, *Double Dragon Gaiden* is no mere nostalgia trip into the 19XXs. The game also brings new elements to the genre, for which developers, Secret Base, should be applauded.

The initial four characters on offer include the ever-present protagonist brothers Billy and Jimmy Lee, their hard-as-nails Uncle Matin, and Jimmy's main squeeze, the oft-captured Marian, who now features as a playable character. Marian is packing heat in the form of a handgun, with a rocket launcher to deploy as her special move. A gun-toting playable character brings some welcome variety to the standard punching and kicking. Moreover, an additional nine playable characters can be unlocked, adding even greater variety to the game.

Double Dragon Gaiden's level structure is noteworthy because you can choose from different "missions" at the start of each game instead of the usual linear





Above: Jimmy's special uppercut takes out his enemies with ease.



Above: Choose your own route through *Double Dragon Gaiden*'s missions.



Above: Swingin' with Jimmy as he takes on Abobo.

DOUBLE
 DRAGON
 Gaiden
 OF THE
 DRAGONS
 FUSION



BILLY LEE

THE YOUNGER BROTHER OF THE TWINS, BILLY IS CAREFREE AND EASYGOING. HE DOESN'T LIKE VIOLENCE AND WOULD MUCH RATHER BE PLAYING VIDEO GAMES.

DESPITE HIS LAID-BACK NATURE, BILLY HAS A STRONG MORAL COMPASS AND WILL NOT HESITATE TO DO THE RIGHT THING.

HE'S AN EXPERT AT SÔSETSUKEN KICK TECHNIQUES.



JIMMY LEE

THE OLDER BROTHER OF THE TWINS, JIMMY HAS A MORE SERIOUS AND INTENSE PERSONALITY. HE'S DEVOTED TO IMPROVING HIS MARTIAL ARTS.

JIMMY ENJOYS A GOOD FIGHT AND IS ALWAYS LOOKING FOR A WORTHY OPPONENT.

HE'S AN EXPERT AT SÔSETSUKEN PUNCH TECHNIQUES.

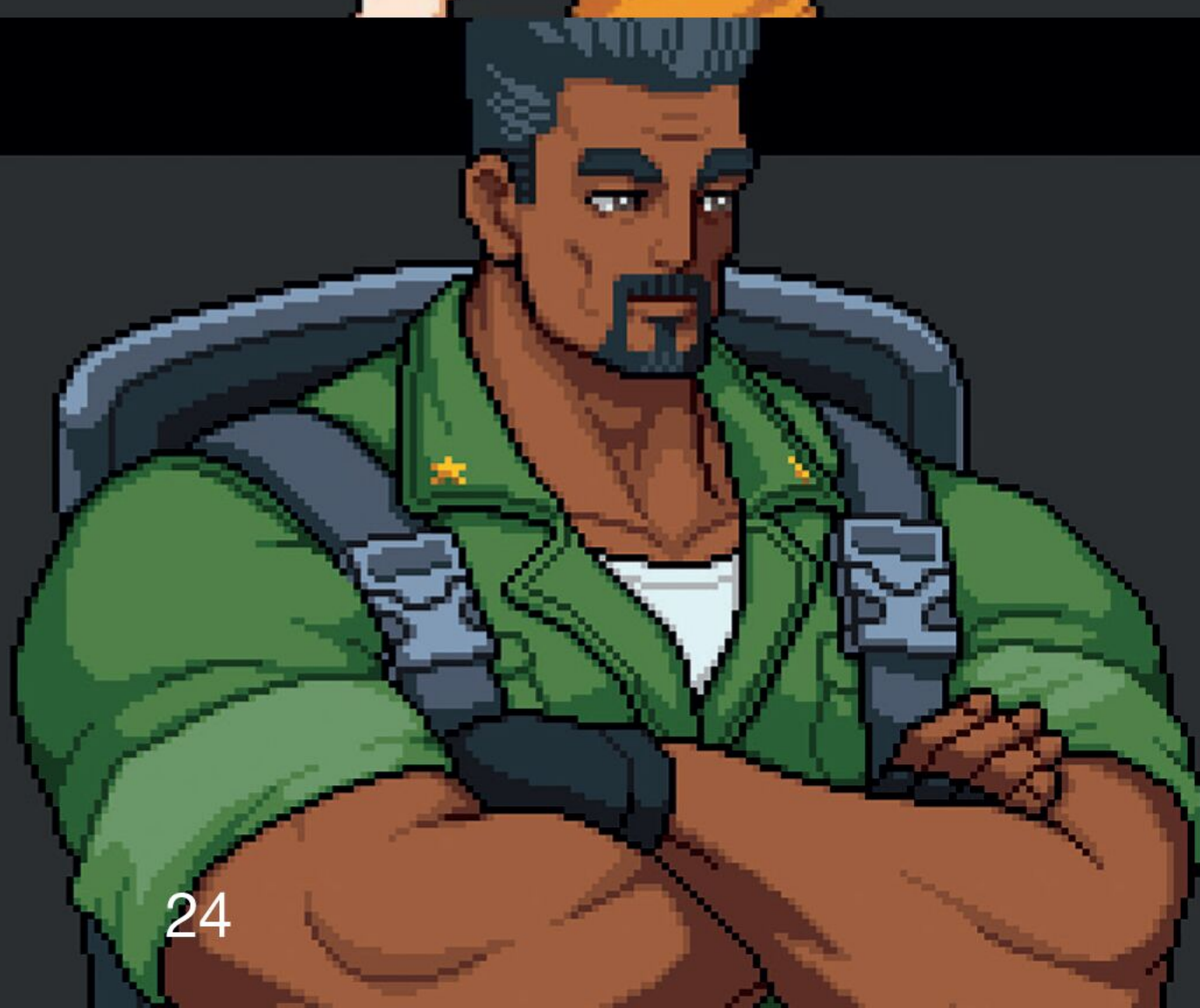


MARIAN

MARIAN IS A CHILDHOOD FRIEND OF THE LEE BROTHERS AND TRAINED WITH THEM AS A KID.

SHARING A SIMILAR SENSE OF JUSTICE, SHE JOINED THE POLICE FORCE.

MARIAN IS MATURE, UNDERSTANDING AND RIGHTEOUS. BUT SHE CAN ALSO BE RASH WHEN FACING INJUSTICE.



UNCLE MARTIN

ONCE A MILITARY MAN, MARTIN IS NOW SOMEONE WHO PREFERS TO AVOID VIOLENCE ALTOGETHER AND LIVE A PEACEFUL LIFE.

HE WAS AN OLD FRIEND AND SPARRING PARTNER TO MASTER LEE. AFTER MASTER LEE VANISHED, MARTIN STARTED TAKING CARE OF THE LEE BROTHERS AND MARIAN.

HE ENJOYS A NICE CUP OF TEA AND HOPES TO OPEN HIS OWN TEA ROOM ONE DAY.



Above: Uncle Martin may prefer peace, but his mighty Power Bomb leaves no foe standing; nor does Marian's gun.

design of playing through level after level. However, while this is a welcome innovation insofar as it prevents later missions from being locked away for players lacking the time or skill to reach them, it only gives the illusion of depth and doesn't enhance the gameplay meaningfully. A token system is also introduced, by which money collected in-game can be exchanged for tokens that can be spent on unlocking characters, power-ups, or continues. It's one of *Double Dragon Gaiden*'s best innovations and adds extra depth to the simple but effective gameplay.

Another neat addition is that of a *Marvel vs Capcom*-style secondary character who you can tag in and will take over should your primary character bite the dust. Another way in which *Double Dragon Gaiden* borrows from one-on-one brawlers is its use of combos and a gauge to build up an all-powerful special move. There's fun to be had trying out different pairs of characters to see how their unique skills complement each other. Or, if you have a chum to help you take on the gangs, there's the local co-op mode you'd expect from a *Double Dragon* game. Online co-op is sadly missing, and it would've been an excellent addition. Hopefully, it will be added in a future update.

Double Dragon Gaiden is refreshingly tough, but don't worry if you're looking for an easier fight. An impressive number of options enable this, including increased health, reduced enemy

aggression and stats, infinite continues, and the ability to buy your way out of death using cash accrued during your game. At its core, *Double Dragon Gaiden* is an excellent side-scrolling beat 'em-up that plays well, with enough innovations to keep the modern gamer interested. But despite the game doing so much right, it still feels underwhelming compared to the genre's standout titles in recent years, like *Streets of Rage IV* and *Final Vendetta*.

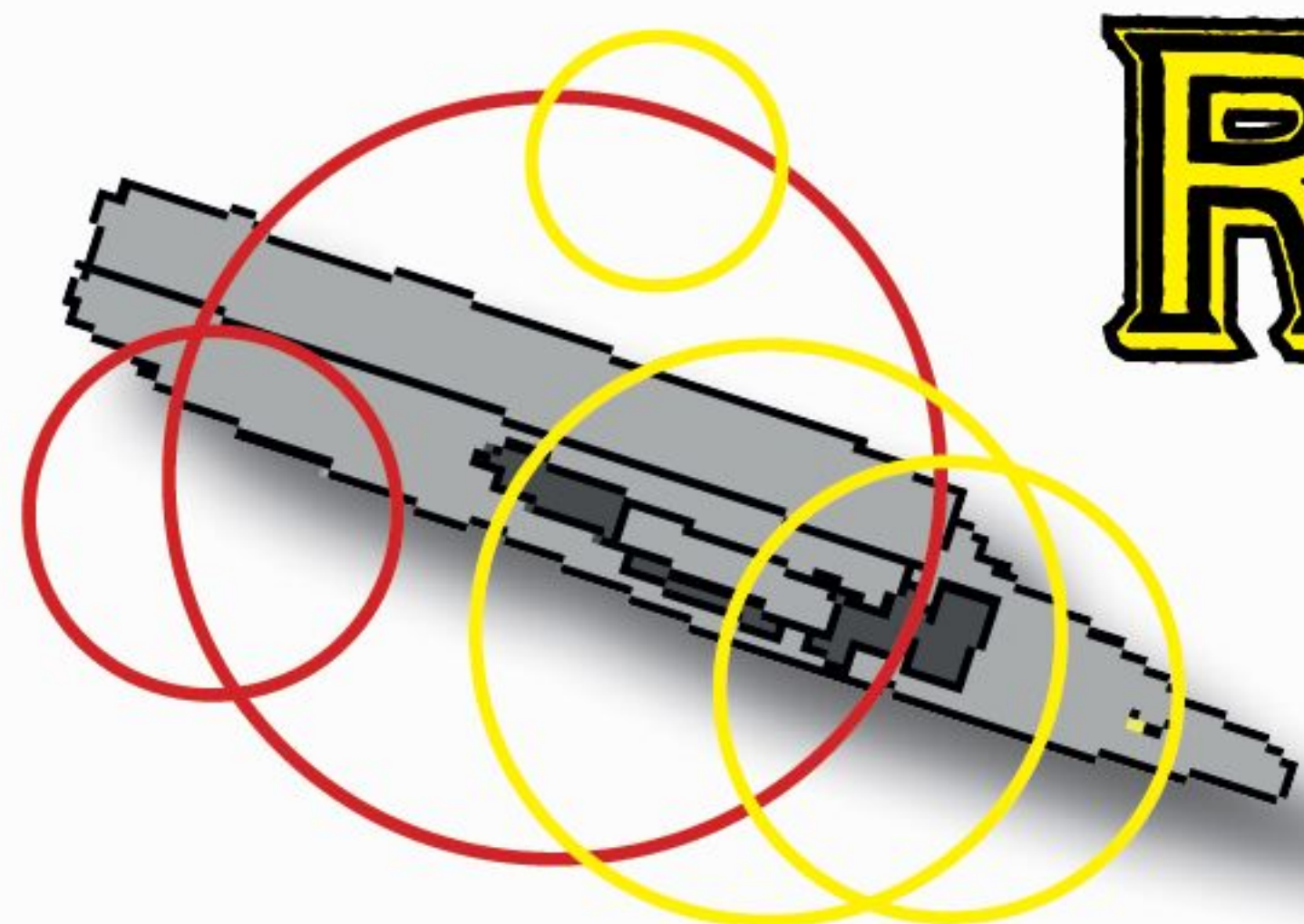
Gauging my Fusion Reaction score for *Double Dragon Gaiden* took much contemplation of my inner Dragon. The needle of my reaction gauge veered wildly from 6 to 8 as I played the game. At one point, I was even (mistakenly) convinced that the game was broken because I couldn't complete a jump, but this was my mistake - I didn't realise that my character could double jump! If you're a fan of beat 'em-ups and you don't make the same foolish mistake I did, you'll definitely have a lot of fun with *Double Dragon Gaiden*.

I hope this isn't the last we'll see of the Lee brothers, though I'd probably prefer their next instalment to be a *Streets of Rage IV*-style update, or maybe a retro-styled *Double Dragon V* or even *Double Dragon Neon II*. ■





HARPOON



RETROSPECTIVE

WORDS BY ANDREW OUSTON

■ Beginning as a naval combat miniatures-based tabletop game, *Harpoon* was originally designed by Larry Bond in the early 1980s. It came to wider notice due to its use in resolving the scenarios posited in *Red Storm Rising*, a novel co-written between Bond and Tom Clancy, who had also used the ruleset as a reference for his debut novel, *The Hunt for Red October*. Naturally, a computer version didn't take long to arrive.

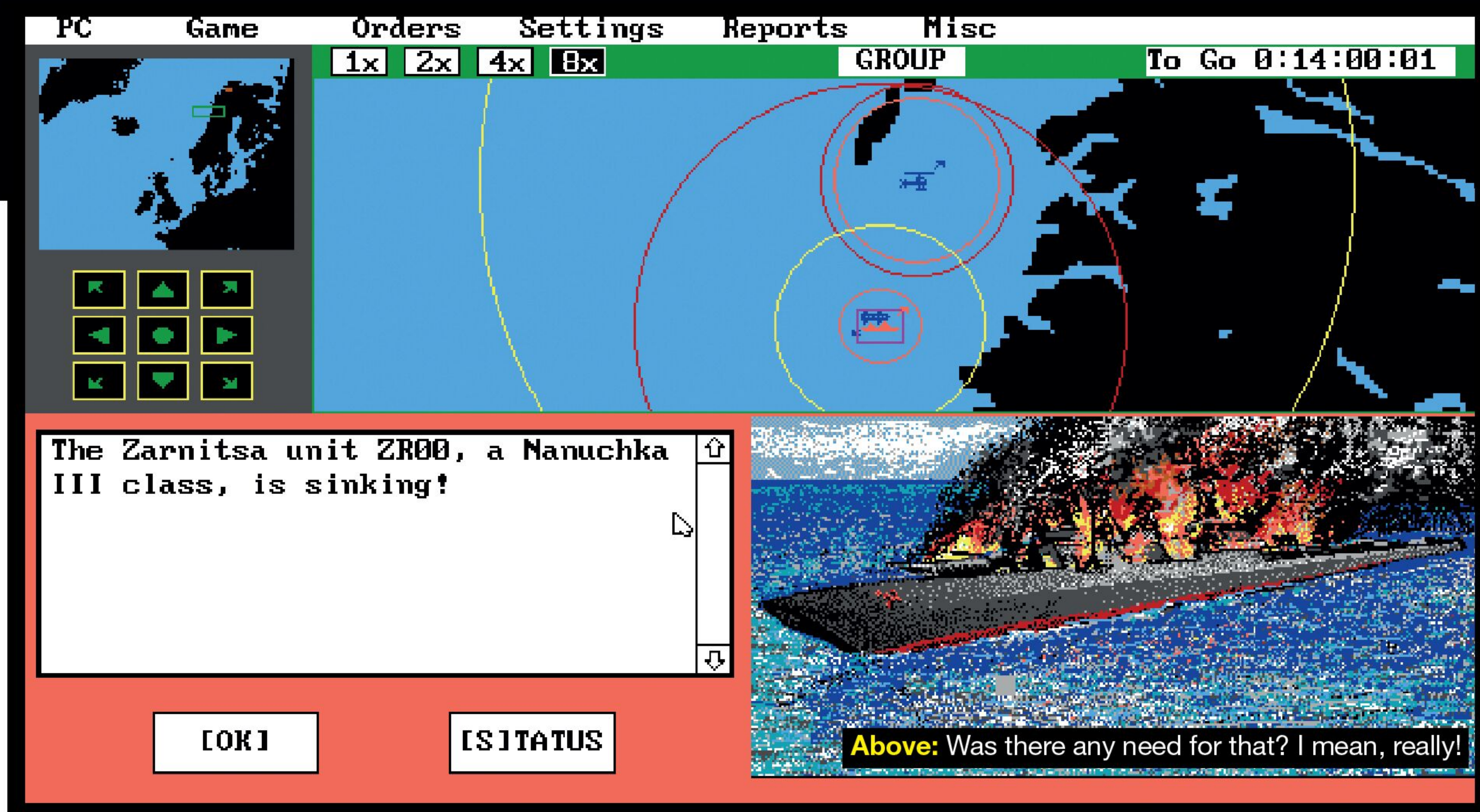
Harpoon requires up to 575KB of memory (ah, those were the days), DOS 2.0, and some high-density disk action. You could only get away with using 720KB disks if you had two floppy drives - the extravagance! But the game lets you

off with anywhere between CGA and high-res EGA graphics. That's a massive 640x350 for all you Digital Foundry fans [Luxury! - Ed]. However, some additional recommended specs did help; a hard drive, 286 or 386 processor, and a mouse would benefit your playing experience. The 286 was a decent machine then, but the 386 cost over £2000. Ports to the Mac and Amiga were also released, and it was on Commodore's finest that I whiled away many a Saturday afternoon with *Harpoon*. And yes, it really needed something more than a plain old 68000 processor.

The game was supplied with the GIUK battle set as standard, pitting NATO against the Soviet Union in the North Atlantic. It encompassed everything from Greenland to Iceland and the United Kingdom. Later sets included the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean.

As you can see from the screenshots, the

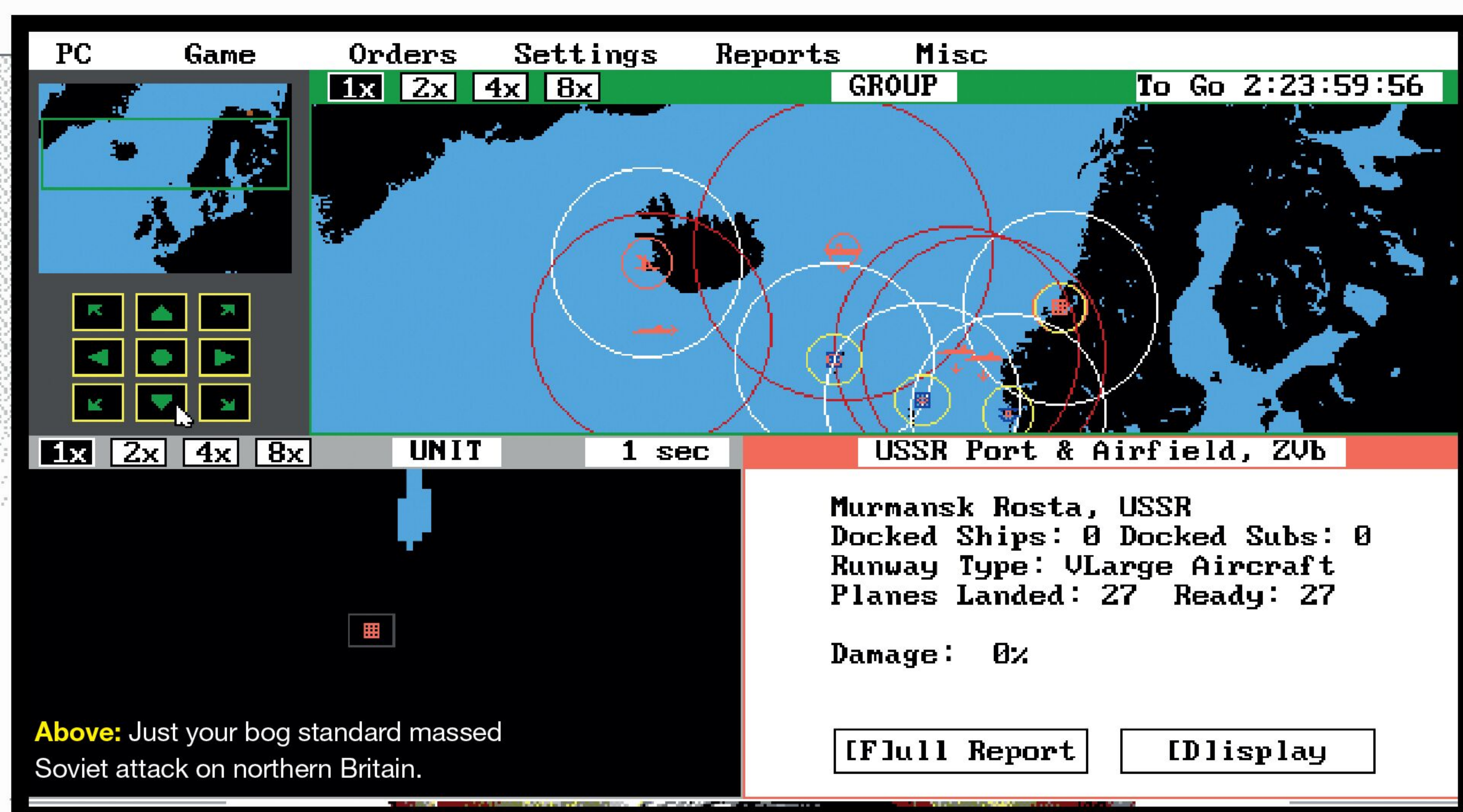


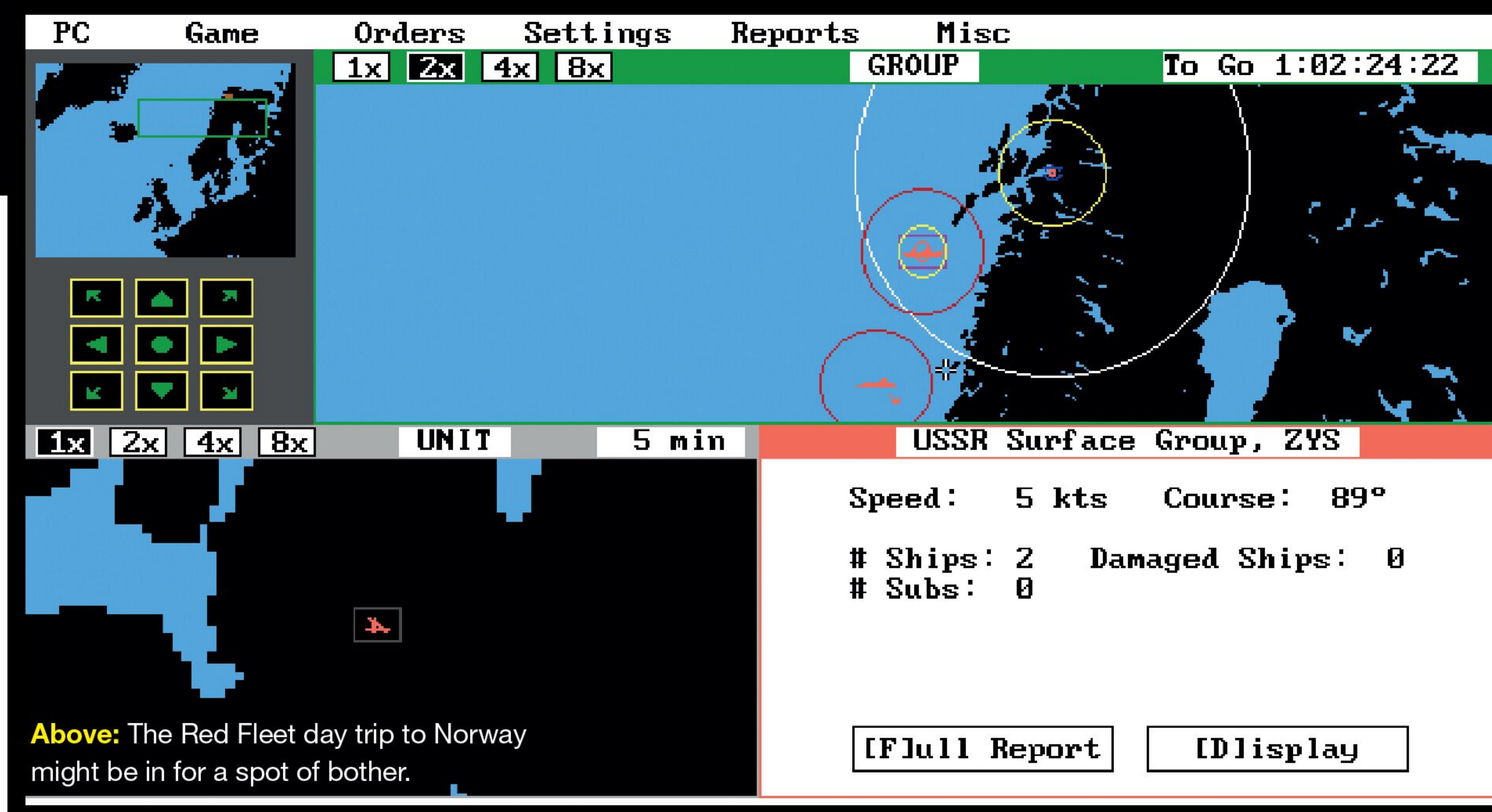


windowed approach practically demands a mouse, but there are shortcut keys for literally everything. There are so many that WordPerfect users would've been jealous! The display itself is divided into four windows - the strategic map is top left, below the navigation buttons is the unit map, and to the right of that is the report window. The biggest window is reserved for the group map, which will be your main viewpoint. The unit map also displays notifications while animations play out in the report window. It's not

just tables and charts, you know, and it's a well-designed user interface.

The Operations Manual gives you a thorough rundown of how the game works, its myriad options, and the political and maritime strategies of the then-Superpowers. It's interesting stuff, especially with the benefit of thirty years of separation. A database of aircraft, submarines, and surface ships is present to assist you in-game, which can be accessed at any point. It is truly a wealth of then-publicly available information.

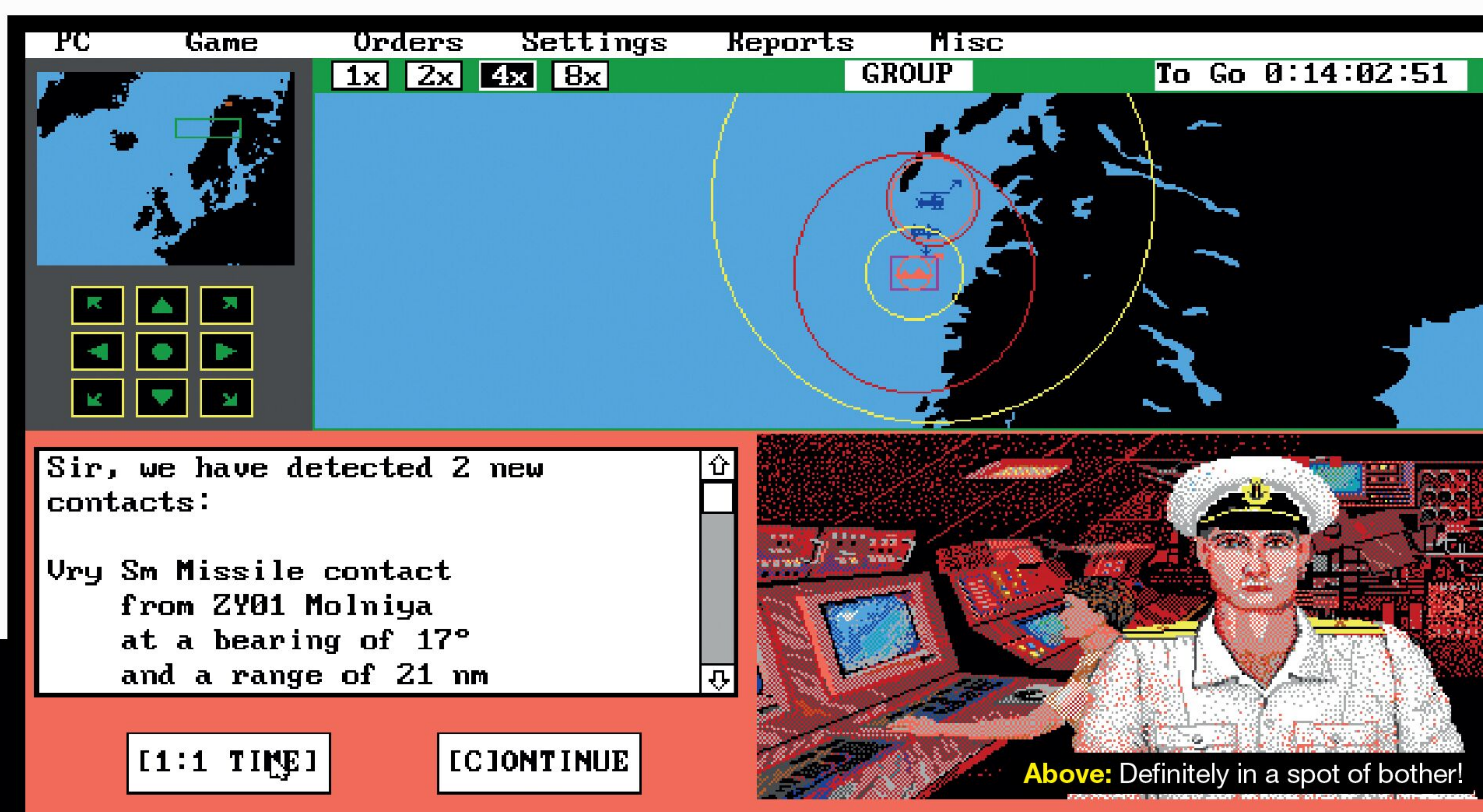


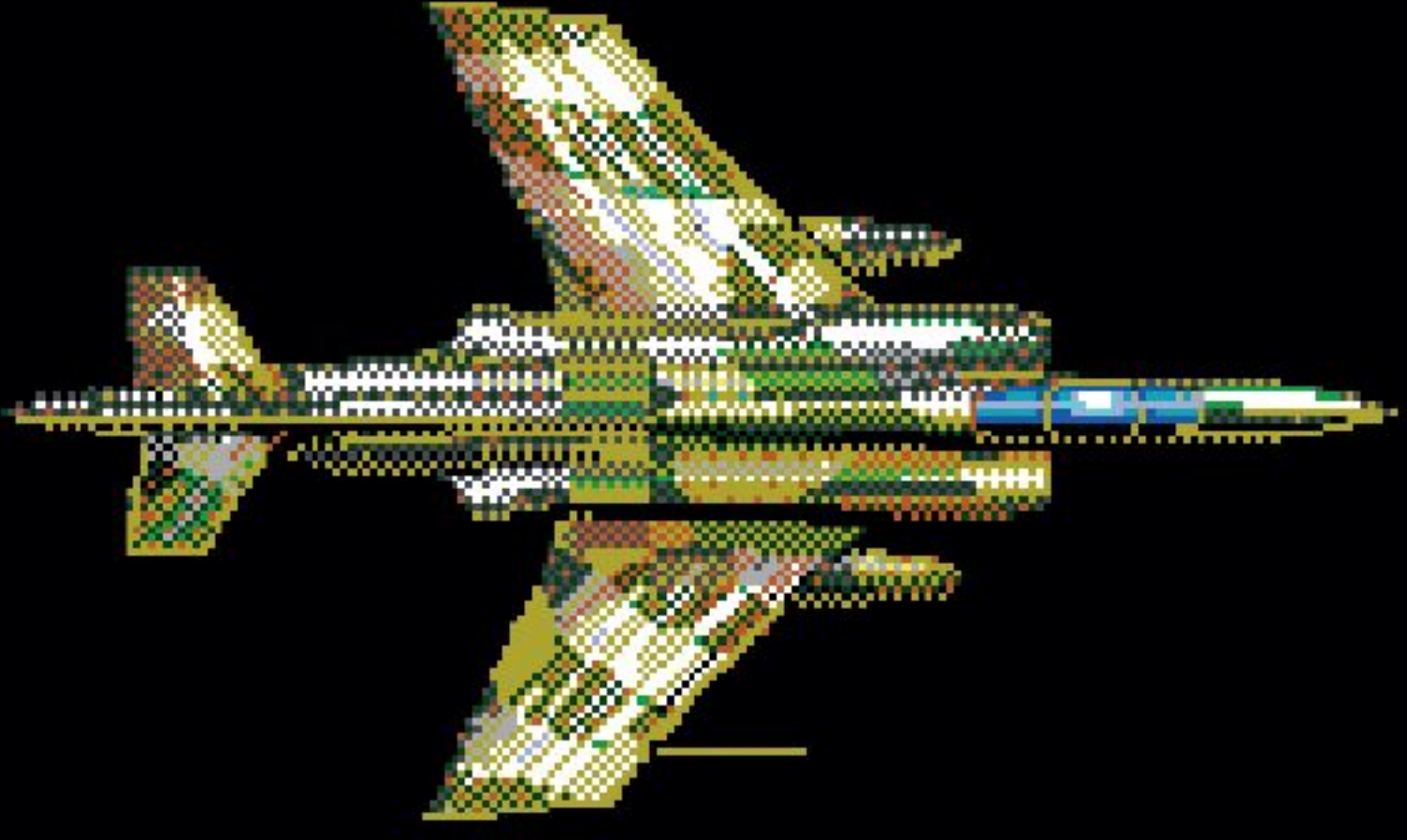


Aside from maps and some reasonable artwork in the database, there isn't much eye candy. The animations in the report window are very basic, and you'll soon get bored of the limited imagery denoting the loss of a unit or whether you've achieved a mission goal. Likewise, music is there for those times you either win or lose.

It is in playing through the scenarios that *Harpoon's* real strengths lie. The twelve included can be played as either NATO or Soviet forces,

and you can toggle options for realistic weather, weapons reloads, and even the possibility of a nuclear weapons release. The basic missions can take just half an hour or so to play, less if you're new to what is an admittedly steep learning curve. *Harpoon* is a game that requires familiarity with the weapons and tactics of the period, but it is also a capable teaching tool, and if you put in the effort, you'll soon get the hang of things. Later missions can last hours, even when using the handy time compression feature.





Class: Attack Buccaneer S.2B

Country: UK

Cruise Range: 2199 nm

Maximum Speed: 610

The British Aerospace Buccaneer was built in the late 1950's and was specifically designed for low-altitude penetration missions. It was flown by the Royal Navy from its aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal, until that ship was decommissioned. The Royal Air Force still operates some land based Buccaneer squadrons. The aircraft is capable of carrying a useful ordnance load against ship or shore targets, but it is a poor air-to-air performer when loaded. Also, it can only carry Sidewinder missiles and has no air-intercept radar. The nearest Soviet equivalent would be the more recent and capable Su-24.

[Exit]

[S]ensors

[W]eapons

[N]ext

[P]revious

When things go well, that can go very well. Setting up patrols, planning your strikes, and ensuring that you've not left any glaring holes in your defences combine to make *Harpoon* a deep and challenging title. It can be very easy to miss something important once you're trying to juggle dozens of aircraft, ships, and subs to achieve what should be a very straightforward goal. When things go wrong, well, they can be horrid.

Harpoon was a huge genre success at the time. It was followed by several sequels, the

most recent being 2010's *Larry Bond's Harpoon: Ultimate Edition*, which includes over twenty versions and is very much a time capsule of "modern" naval wargaming. The tabletop game has lasted longer, with *Harpoon V* published in 2020. *Command: Modern Operations* looks decent (if a tad pricey) on Steam for those who want a more modern digital take on *Harpoon*. For me, however, the original *Harpoon* v1.0 has a certain charm that keeps me coming back. ■

PC

Game

Orders

Settings

Reports

Misc

1x 2x 4x 8x

GROUP

To Go 0:14:01:39



1x 2x 4x 8x

UNIT

1 sec

NATO Missile Group, ACM

3 X Vry Sm Missile contact

Speed 560 kts Course: 206°

[Full Report]

[Display]

Above: Vampires, Vampires, Vampires!

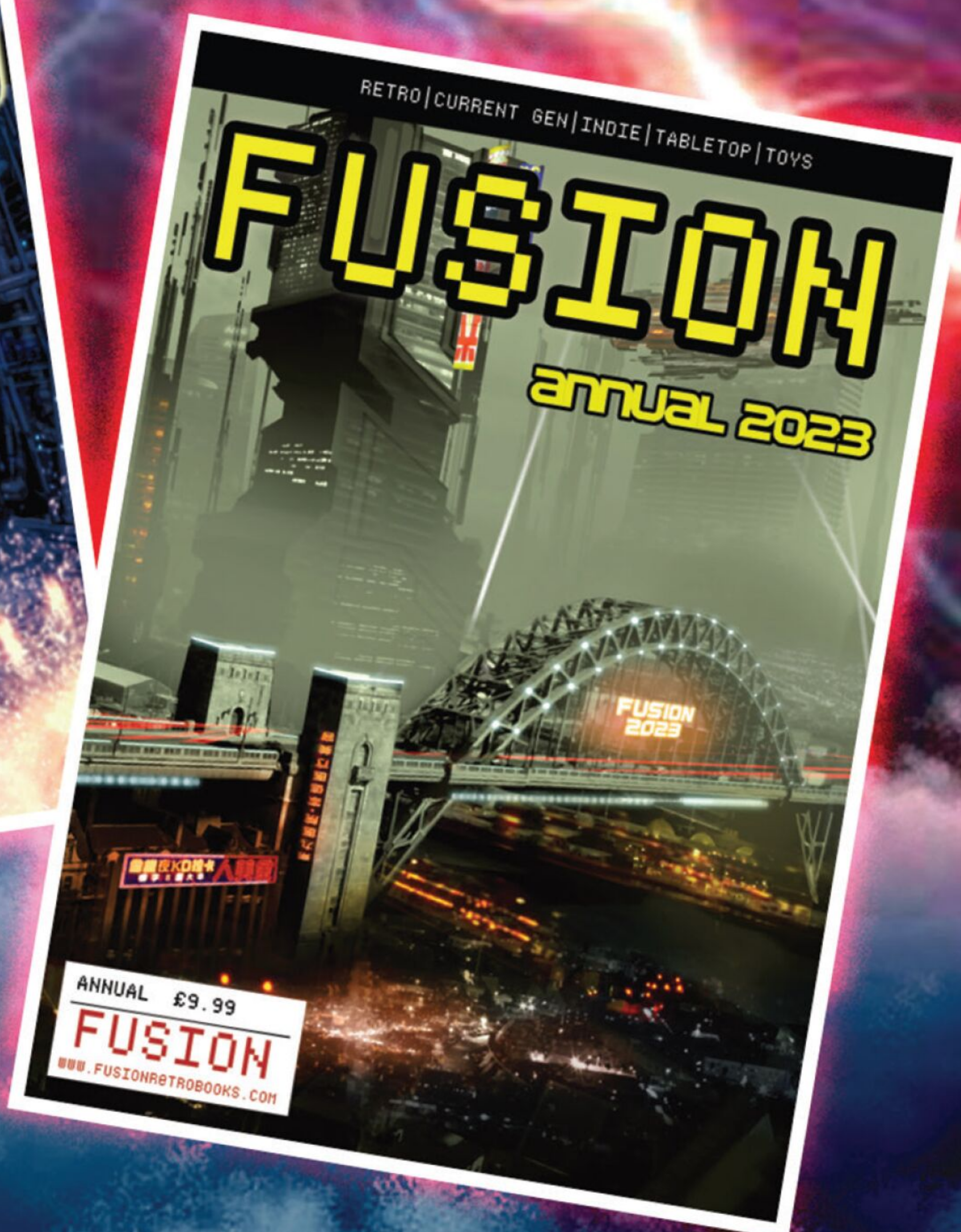


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FUSION



FUSION MUSICAL MARVELS

**BEN HONEBONE AIR-BRAKES
BACK TO THE 90S AND
THE F5000 ANTI-GRAVITY
RACING LEAGUE FOR THIS
MONTH'S MUSICAL MARVEL.**



Musical Marvel: Bang On!

Game: Wipeout 64

System: N64

Composer: Propellerheads

Year: 1999

Soundtrack Link:

<https://bit.ly/3OYlbIN>



■ Sony's PlayStation revolutionised home gaming in 1995, and *Wipeout* was one of its launch titles. The lightning-fast 3D anti-gravity racing combined with Sony's edgy and aggressive advertising turned *Wipeout* into a hit. However, its success wasn't just down to the finely tuned gameplay and next-gen graphics.

The power of the PlayStation's CD-ROM drive allowed developers Psygnosis to imbue *Wipeout* with a secret ingredient to complement the fast-paced action. Drawing on the popularity of dance and trance music at the time, *Wipeout* featured

POSITION 15 OF 15

a stunning contemporary soundtrack from the likes of CoLD StoRAGE, The Chemical Brothers, Orbital, Kraftwerk, and more. The cocktail of futuristic racing and “banging tunes” turned *Wipeout* into a phenomenon. The storage on a 650MB CD meant that video games could now provide a more expansive and professional-sounding soundtrack, more akin to a film.

For N64 owners, *Wipeout* and its sequel, *Wipeout 2097*, was a special sauce only available to PlayStation owners. But, in 1999, *Wipeout 64* arrived, and with some clever editing and compression techniques, Psygnosis worked the same musical magic on the N64’s meagre 64MB cartridge. Of course, some compromises had to be made with the new soundtrack. Individual tracks by Propellerheads, Fluke, and Rob Lord were edited into shorter audio loops and played back in specific sequences to build a complete track. Despite the reduced audio quality, the resulting combination of “phat beats” and futuristic racing was just as intoxicating as the PlayStation original.

The Propellerheads track, Bang On!, will forever be associated with *Wipeout 64* after my experience playing the game back in 1999. I was already a fan of the Propellerheads’ music then, and their inclusion on the soundtrack, albeit with just one track, was a stroke of genius. Bang On! gives the *Wipeout 64* soundtrack a shot of pure adrenaline, countering the mid-paced offerings from Fluke and Rob Lord with a chaotic and bombastic onslaught of drums, guitars, and samples. It always felt like you were going faster when Bang On! played. ■



Crossover

Roll For Initiative

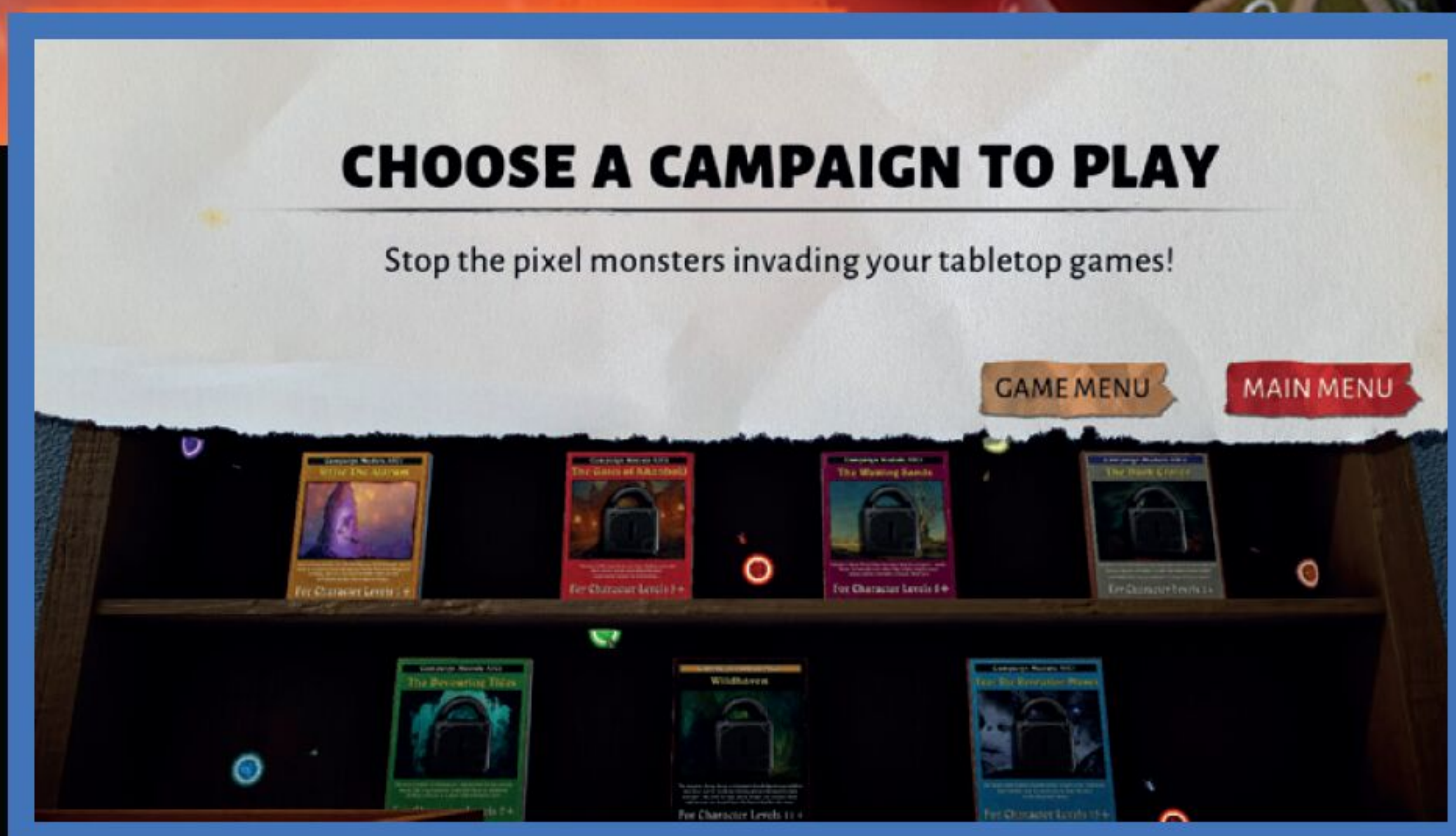
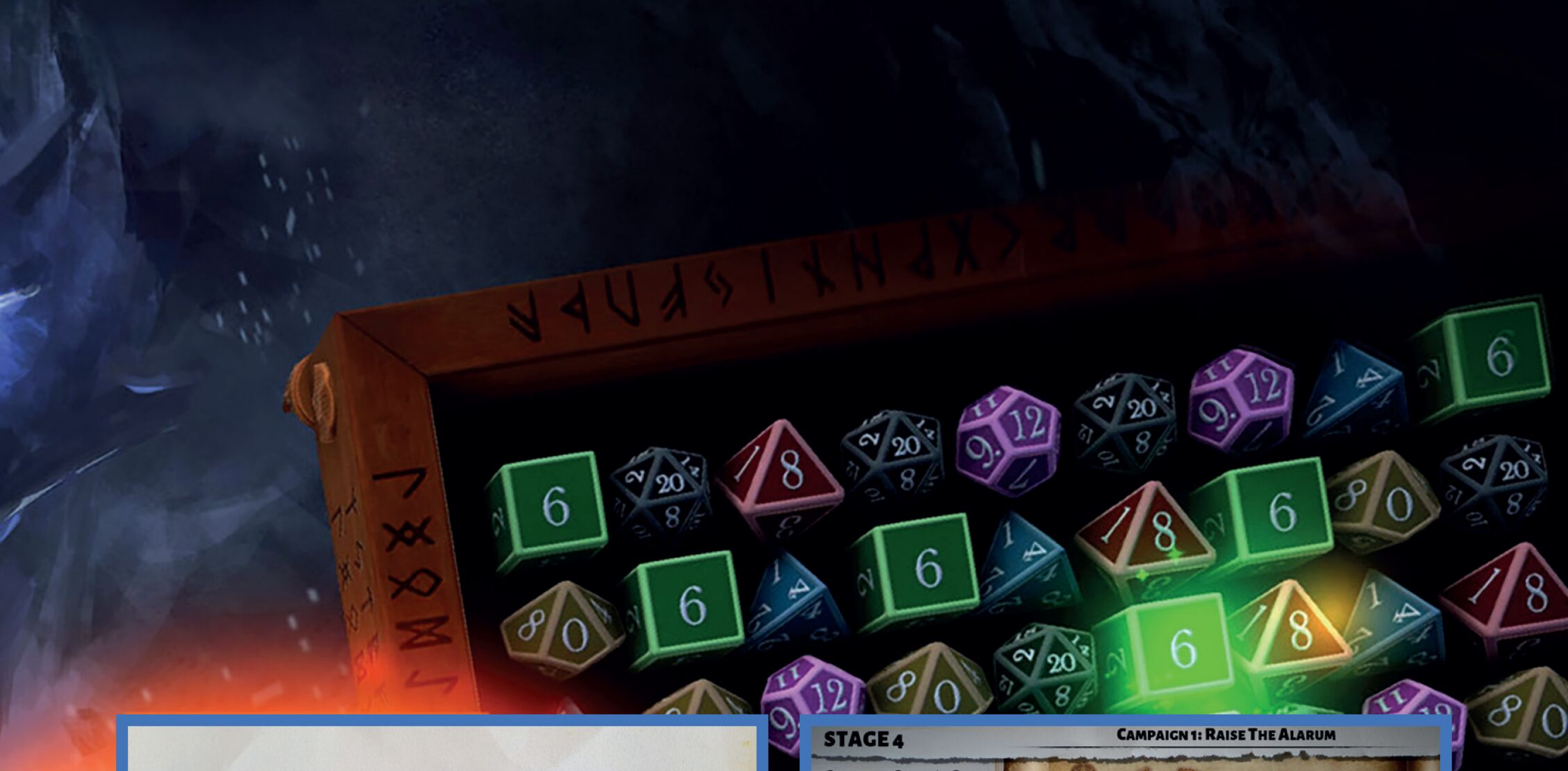
THE FAMOUS PUBLISHER MICROPROSE WAS PROBABLY BEST KNOWN FOR ITS SIMULATION AND STRATEGY GAMES. BUT THE REVIVED LABEL IS NOW PUBLISHING ITS FIRST NEW TITLES, AND ANDREW FISHER WAS GIVEN THE FIRST LOOK AT A NEW GAME THAT TRIES SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT, MIXING MATCH-3 MECHANICS AND TOWER DEFENCE.

■ What if tiny monsters from a computer game crossed over into the real world? After a late-night session on your G64 computer, you take a break by rolling up a character sheet for a role-playing game you want to try tomorrow. And then, lightning

appears outside your window, and your computer screen glows. Out of nowhere, tiny creatures step out of portals and start to attack your character sheet!

Your view is from above, with the stats on your character sheet acting as the places you need to defend. On the right is your dice tray. By matching three or more of the same type, the matched dice disappear, and more dice roll into the tray. These give you powers, including energy for your spells. When you clear enough of one type, the dice type bottom-right glows and clicking on it unleashes a special effect - a Dice Ultra. As enemies attack, your stats will go down - if you run out of Hit Points, it's Game Over.

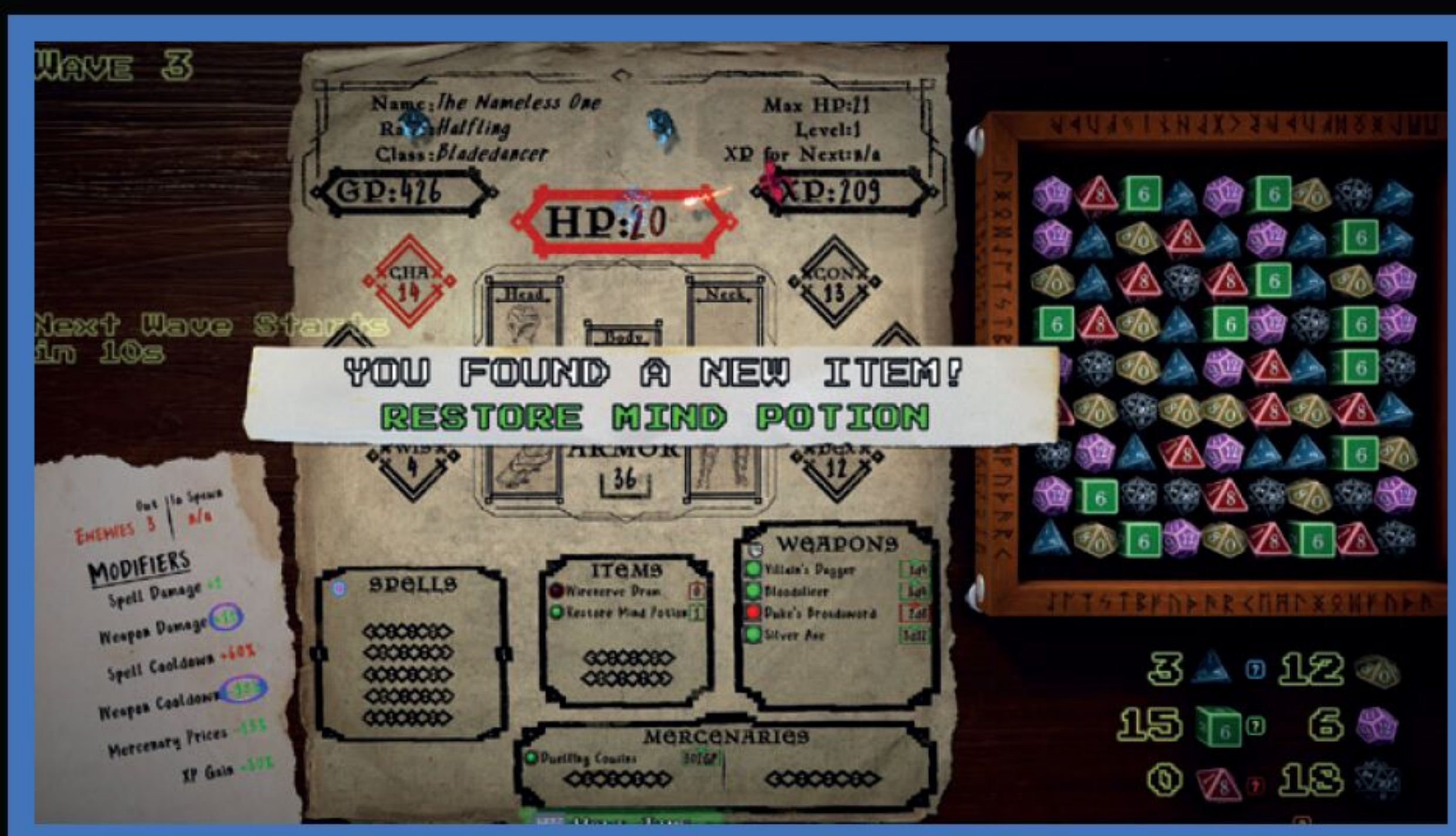
Also on your character sheet are the spells, weapons, and items you can equip. Left-clicking selects while right-clicking activates - with an



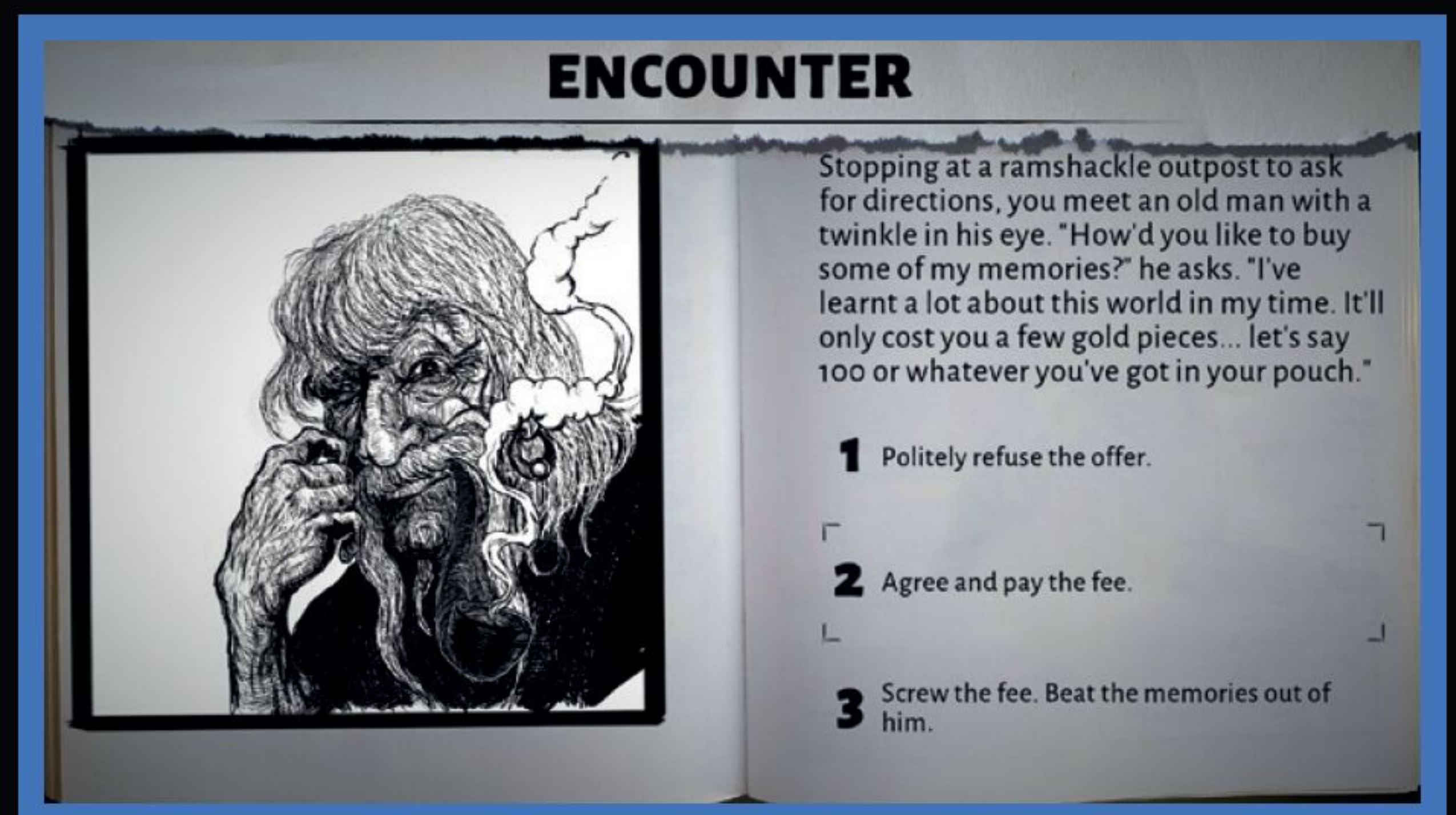
Above: Picking a campaign box from the virtual shelf.



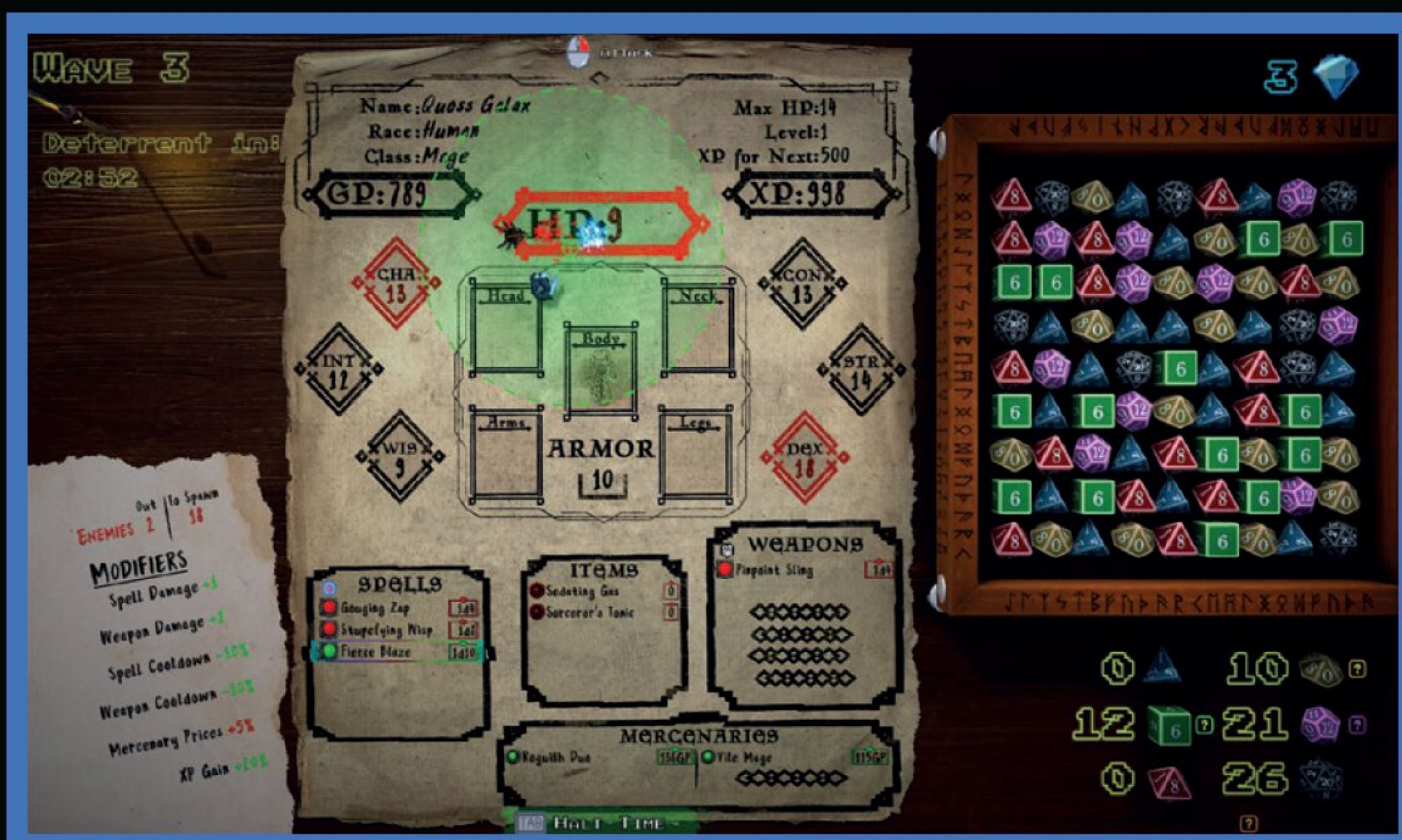
Above: Each chapter of the campaign has its own map.



Above: Battling through Endless Mode unlocks extra items.



Above: Picking the right option in an Encounter will help you.



Above: A spell hits its target.

aiming reticule appearing and the circle showing the area of effect. Weapons and spells have a cooldown timer affected by your character's stats - turning red after activation and then slowly back to green. Items show how many you have left in stock. Mercenaries can be hired to "roam" the sheet and take on opponents for a limited time by spending gold. With enough experience points earned in battle, you can level up and spend gold on items.

The single-player campaign features two different settings, chosen



By the side of the path you see a winged wolf trying to lap from a puddle. The flying creature, born from magical experiments, has a hunter's arrow through its jaw, making drinking difficult. Its ribs are visible beneath its mangy fur.

- 1** Leave the beast alone. There's nothing you can do for it now.
- 2** Put it out of its misery. Winged wolves are the scourge of livestock and often have bounties...
- 3** Try to remove the arrow. Even winged wolves don't deserve to suffer like this.

by “picking” a board game from the shelf. Each campaign is split into chapters set on a map, with each chapter divided into stages. During a stage, there are several enemy waves to survive, with more formidable enemies gradually appearing. Extra items and weapons are unlocked as you progress; completing a stage can reward you with an extra item or skill. As you move around the chapter's map, there may be random Encounters. These have gorgeous black & white illustrations and a choice of dialogue/action.

Choose the right one to get a bonus, or pick the bad one, and there will be consequences (typically costing gold or skill points). Should you fail a Stage, you can try again or save your progress to continue playing another day.

Co-Op Mode is very interesting, allowing you to play with someone else online. Host Game makes you the player in charge of the attacks on the left-hand side of the screen, with the other player matching the dice. Or you can join a game, giving you the responsibility of dealing



Above: In Dice Defence, the radius of attack is shown by the coloured circles around each character stat.



Above: *The Gibbonator*, a retro shoot 'em-up seemingly inspired by *Gyruss*.

with the dice side while the host carries out the attacks. Endless Game is for a single player; as the name implies, it gives you endless waves to survive. New weapons and abilities will be unlocked as you progress – and using your Dice Ultras is essential. As you beat waves, your high score is shown and your Rank increases.

Finally, Dice Defence is a purer 'tower defence' game. Five towers are on screen, allowing you to choose between physical or spell attacks for each – and swap their positions. A circular ring shows the area each tower can attack in, and enemies entering that area will be attacked if you have enough dice. To succeed, the player must concentrate on matching lots of dice on the right and using Dice Ultras. As you collect gold, pressing Tab allows you to upgrade your towers, increasing the damage dealt, firing speed, and adding other abilities. There is a separate Rank and high-score table for this mode.

The designer of *Crossover: Roll For Initiative*, Phil (The Pale Gibbon), explained that a little surprise awaited me in-game. Clicking a certain area on the title screen revealed a hidden retro game called *The Gibbonator*. Your little spaceship sits in the middle of the screen and can rotate left and right to shoot at the enemies. These swarm around you in circles, gradually moving closer as more waves arrive. Shoot as

many as possible before they get close enough to shoot back. It's a fun little extra that I enjoyed.

Crossover: Roll For Initiative is a quirky and different game worth trying. The presentation is excellent, from the rolling dice to the illustrations portraying the locations and creatures you encounter. There are clever effects as the spells and weapons do damage, with fire and lightning in abundance. There is excellent background music, with the familiar name of Chris Huelsbeck being one of those credited. Sound effects are good without overwhelming the player. The little creatures look great even from your overhead viewpoint, with flapping dragons and lumbering giants hacking away at your character sheet.

At the time of writing, the localisation and finishing touches are being worked on before MicroProse releases *Crossover: Roll For Initiative*, due by the end of 2023. There will be extra campaigns beyond the two included in the demo. Plans for these include a Cthulhu-style adventure with a sanity mechanic, a World War II-themed campaign based on some of MicroProse's old properties (with bombers, vehicles, etc.), and more. If this were a full review, my FUSION Reaction would be 8, and extra campaigns will only increase the appeal. ■

Wishlist the game now at:
<https://bit.ly/crossover-steam>

RETROSPECTIVE

RIDGE RACER TYPE 4

WORDS BY FAITH JOHNSON

Ridge Racer was a system seller for PlayStation during the 90s. From the very first entry, right up to the fourth game, Namco's arcade blockbuster was seen as one of the racing genre's very best series. There had been a shift in direction with the third PlayStation game, *Rage Racer*, which had more realistic mechanics but failed to improve on the gameplay of the previous entries. Namco took the criticism that followed on board, and *Ridge Racer Type 4* was released in Japan in December 1998, with a Western release following in 1999. It was a critical and commercial success, selling well over one million copies worldwide. This success was mainly down to the overall improvement in the gameplay and the number of tracks, cars, and competitions that provided lots of replayability.

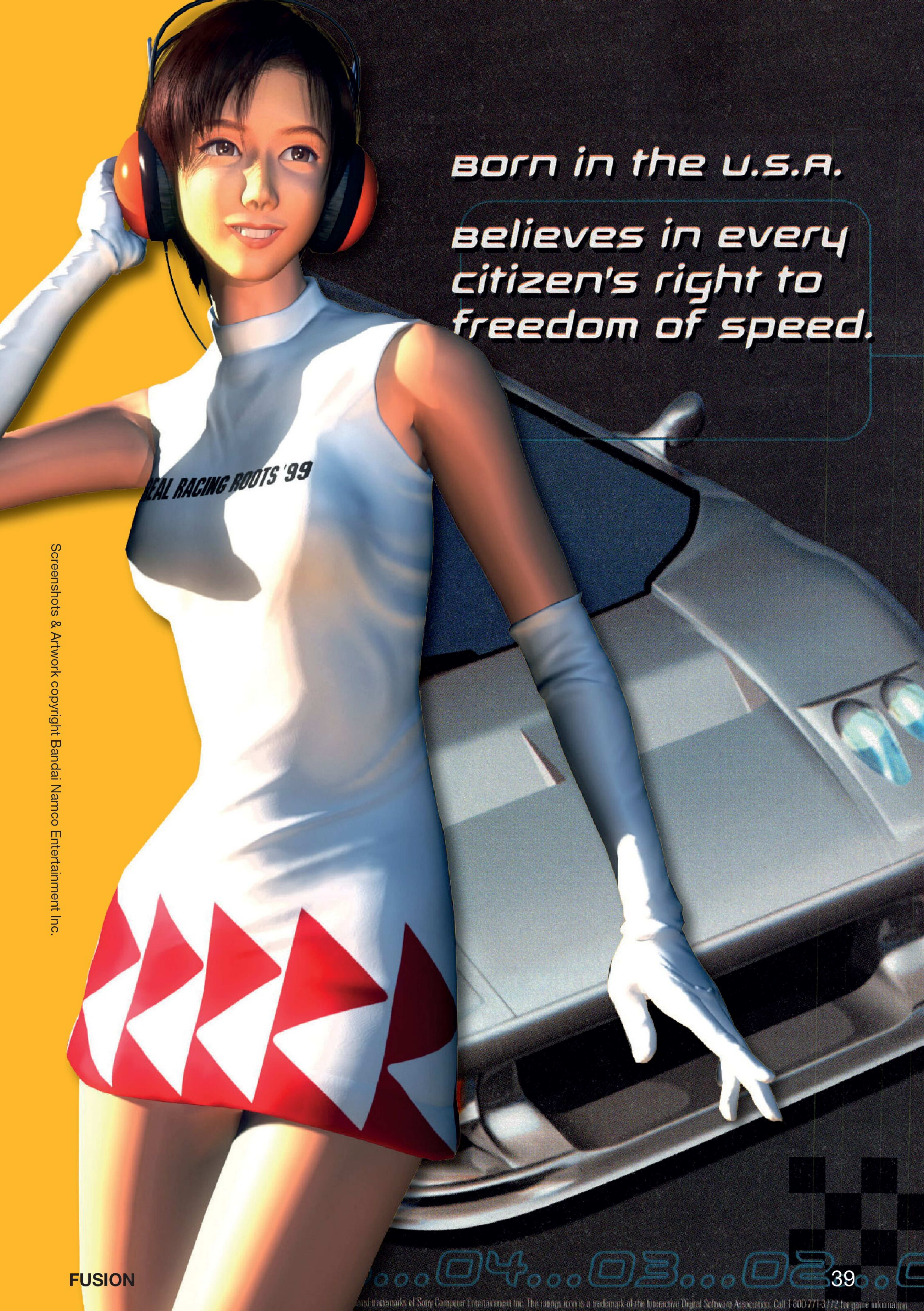
The most notable improvement was the team and manufacturer system that made up the Grand Prix mode. You start by selecting one of four

teams, each with its own characters and look. You then choose one of four manufacturers, each with different driving styles. There are two types of cars to race in *Ridge Racer Type 4*. Drift cars require you to balance tapping the brake while taking a turn with the hope of creating a smooth arc so as not to lose speed. The second type is Grip, cars which use a mechanic that switches between braking and accelerating to create a powerslide.

Using these two different driving types opened up the depth of the overall gameplay



Above: The long straights work best when trying to overtake your rivals.



Born in the U.S.A.

*believes in every
citizen's right to
freedom of speed.*

Screenshots & Artwork copyright Bandai Namco Entertainment Inc.



Above: Some races take place at night with some very nice lighting from the PlayStation.

and gave you an almost endless way to keep progressing. Combining the four-team, four-manufacture system, you could unlock 320 new cars by finishing in different positions in Grand Prix mode. It sounds like a lot to unlock, and it certainly is. To complete the entire game, you needed to win the Grand Prix as every team mixed with every manufacturer. For the first time, a *Ridge Racer* game had real longevity beyond the simple time attack and two-player racing over a few tracks. If you managed to unlock all 320 cars, you were rewarded with a trophy car shaped like a giant Pac-Man.

After you'd finished winning all the vehicles, there were many other modes to try. The basic time attack, single race modes, and split-screen two-player, a first for the series, were present. If you felt creative, you could design decals for your unlocked cars to give them a personal touch. A PlayStation Link Cable mode allowed four players to compete against each other over two TVs. *Ridge Racer Type 4* was the biggest entry in the series, and it took months to see everything the game had to offer.

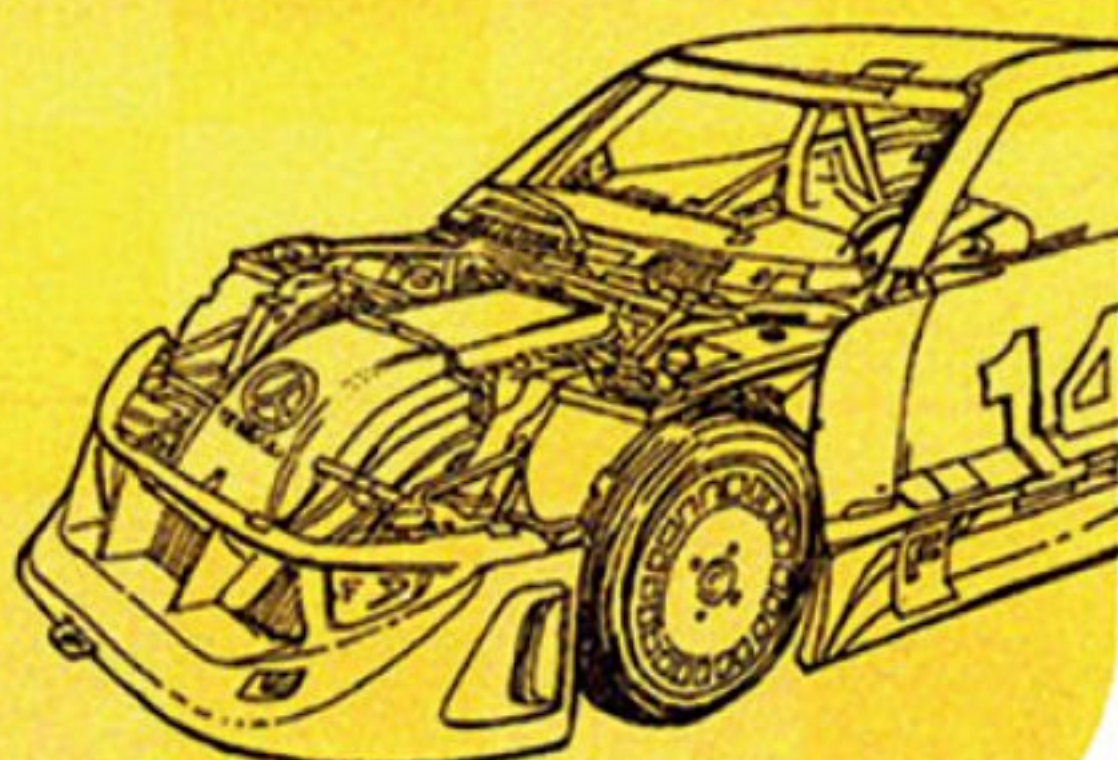
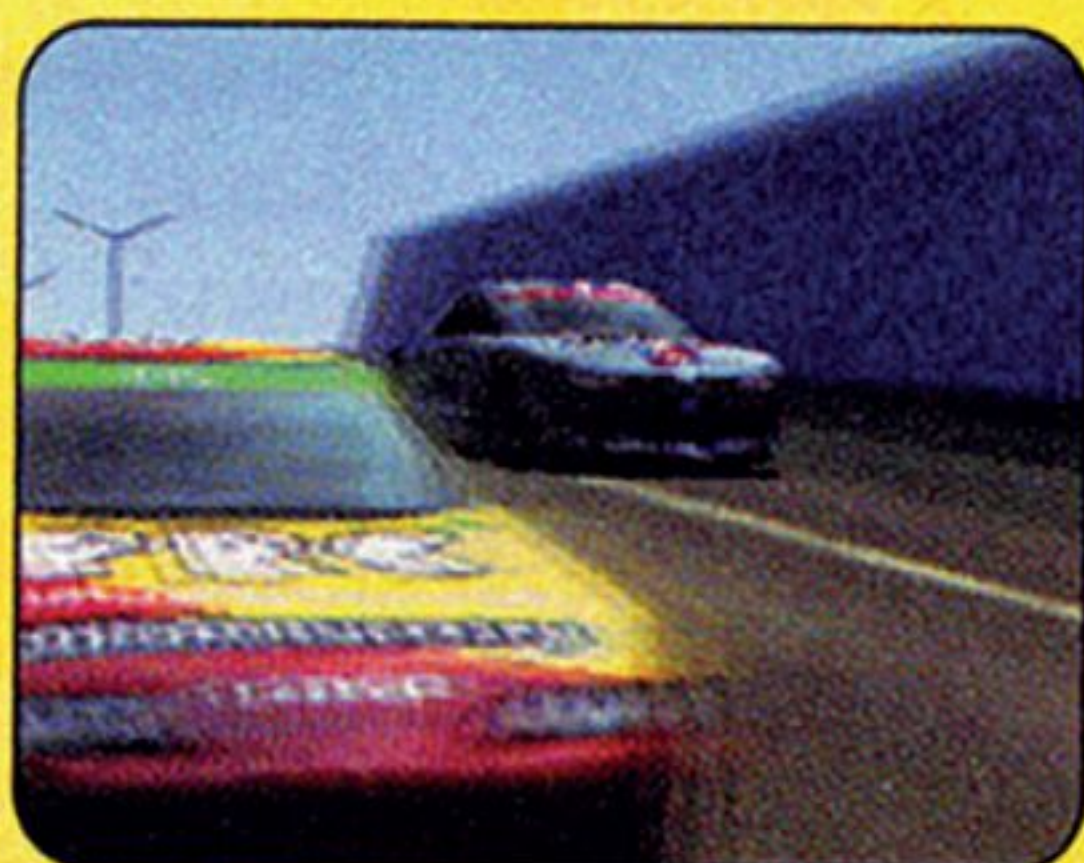
It wasn't just the amount of cars that helped *Ridge Racer Type 4* stand out as one of the

- Sensational graphics and lighting effects give every race a cinematic feel

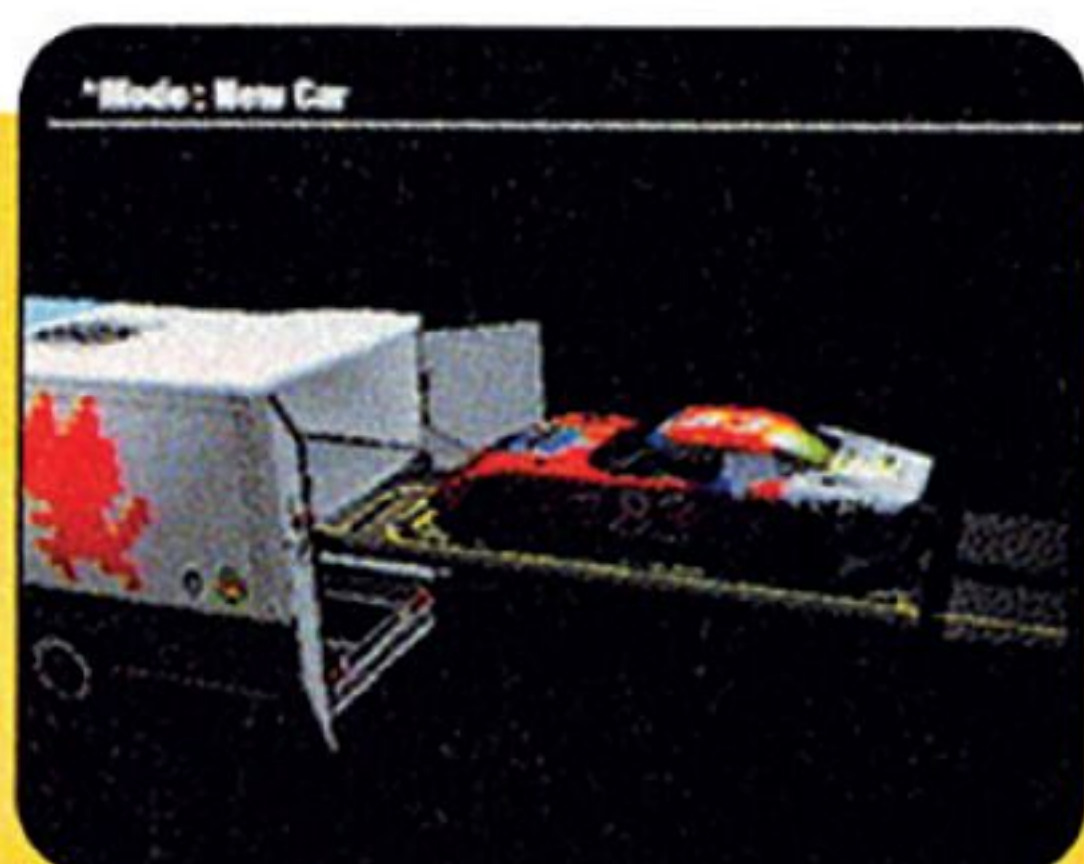
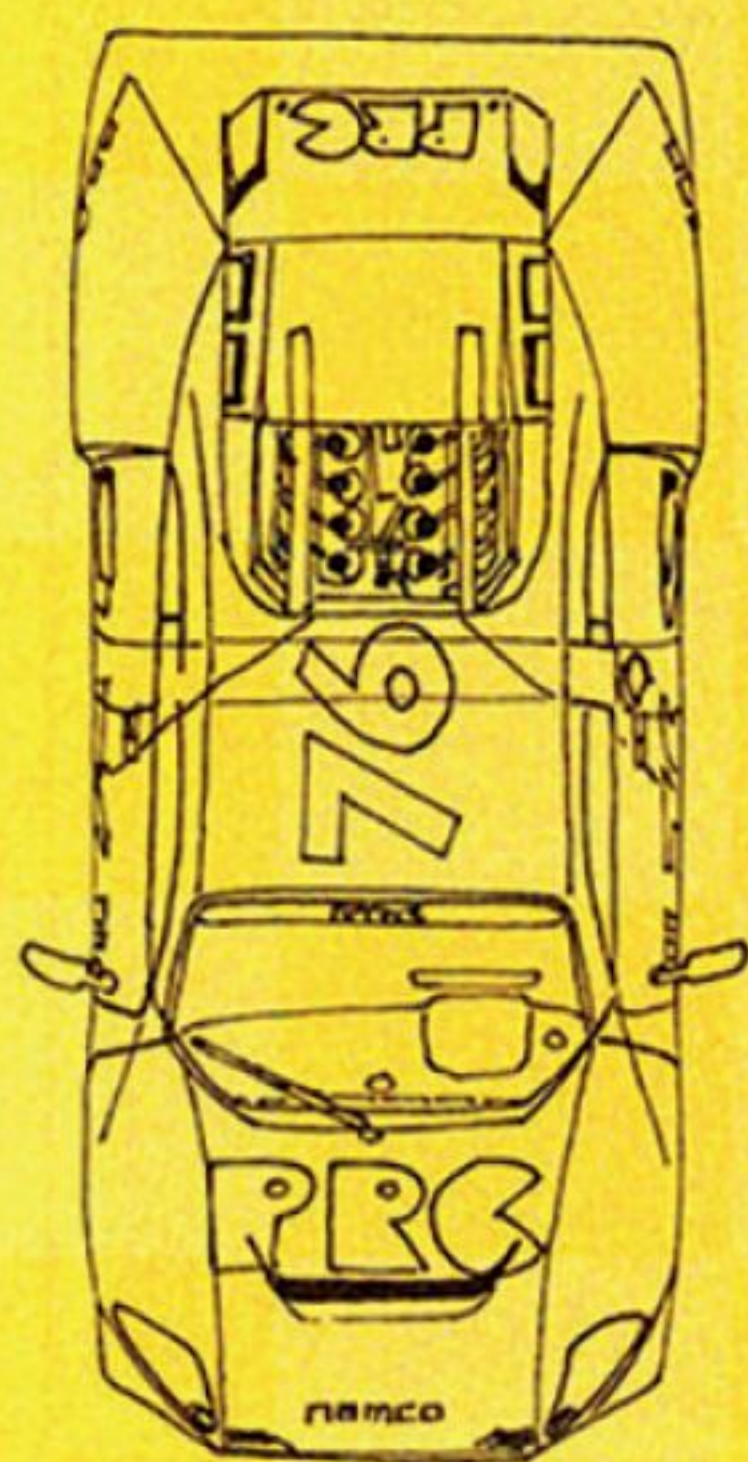
- Race at all times of day and night, even during dramatic sunsets

- Relive your greatest moments through the dynamic-camera replay mode

- Watch your race with all-new motion-blur effects



- Battle head-to-head in split-screen vs. mode



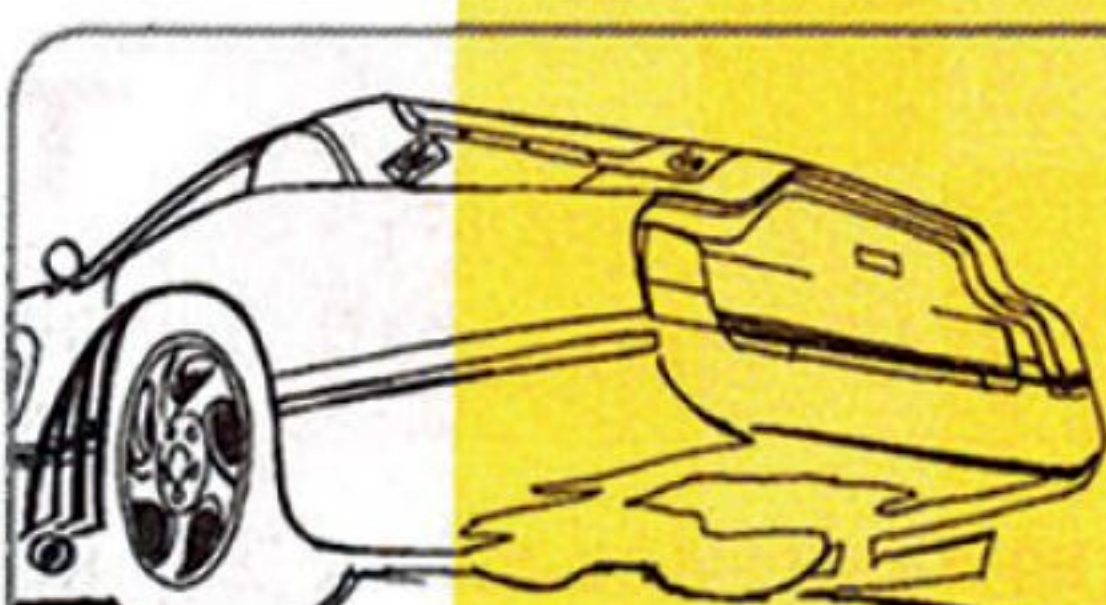
- Speed-tuned physics keep the arcade-style action fast-paced
- Championship performances unlock secret hidden supercars
- Don't be afraid to bump the other car, it's all part of a winning strategy



- Join one of four international race teams - each with individual strengths and weaknesses
- Design original logos to customize your car



- Race on gorgeous cityscape, countryside and racetrack courses

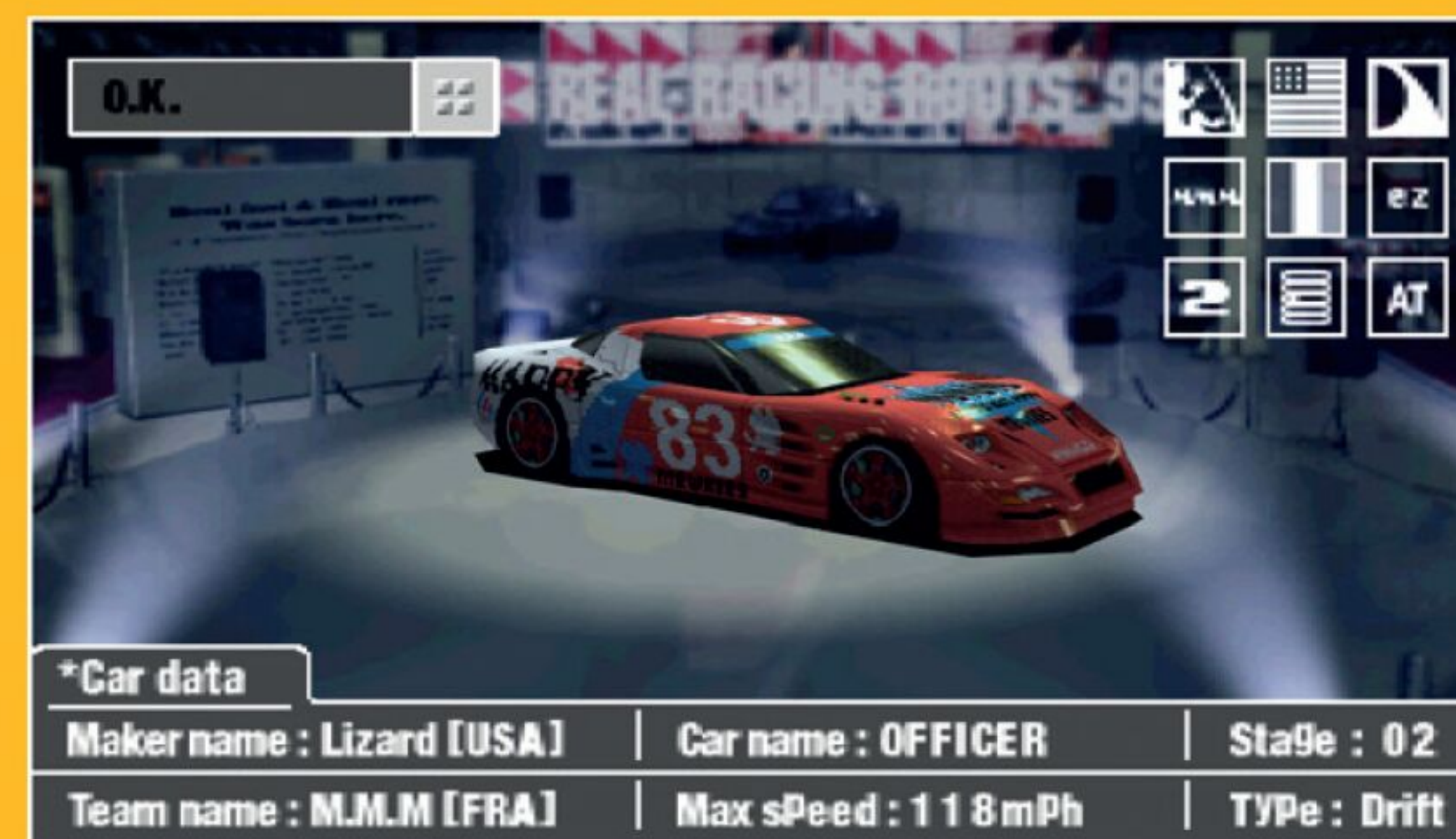


- Money can't buy victory. You've got to earn new cars with your race performance



- Experience all the ups and downs of a full racing season in the Grand Prix mode
- Includes a Ridge Racer Turbo Mode bonus disc with a 60 FPS track

*Mode : Car Data



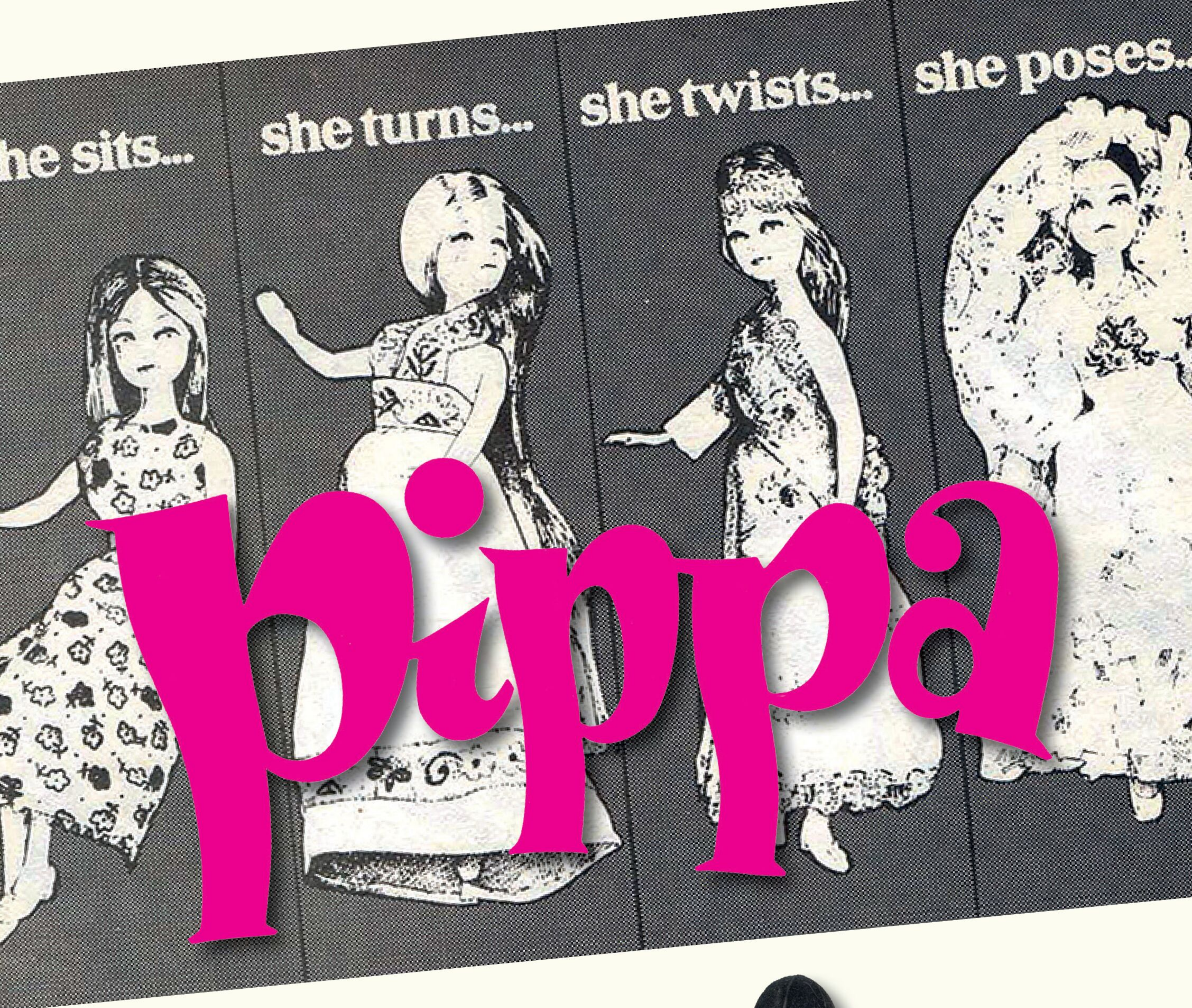
Directional Buttons : Select | O Button : O.K. | X Button : — | Please

Above: There are over 320 cars to unlock and customise.

generation's most significant titles. The overall gameplay is so smooth one wonders how Namco managed to produce such a slick game on the ageing PlayStation. It shows off what the system can do with its large tracks, detailed cars, and excellent FMV sequences. The fantastic visuals were backed up with a sharp, pounding soundtrack that sounded almost good enough to be real chart music. Then there was the speed that some of the prototype vehicles could reach; it felt like the future of racing games at the time and is still impressive to see on a PlayStation today.

Ridge Racer Type 4 could be purchased with a special controller called a Jogcon. This unwieldy device had a mini steering wheel in the controller's centre, replacing the two analogue sticks. While it was a fun device, it couldn't match the sense of immersion a proper steering wheel could offer, although it was fun to try at the time. There was also compatibility with the Japanese-exclusive PocketStation that worked similarly to a VMU on the Dreamcast. Combining two PocketStations would enable friends to trade cars they had unlocked. It was clear that Namco had thrown all its eggs into the *Ridge Racer Type 4* basket, using almost every aspect of the PlayStation's functionality while moving the series onto a new level.

There isn't much to dislike about *Ridge Racer Type 4*; it felt like lightning in a bottle at the turn of the century. It was an impressive technical achievement, containing so many cars, tracks, and modes. It seems as though this is where the series peaked. There have been a few decent sequels, but *Ridge Racer* has never reached the same heights since. ■



When you think of classic dolls, two big hitters, Barbie by Mattel from the US and Pedigree's Sindy Doll here in the UK, come to mind. While these were and still are some of the most popular dolls, there have been many others over the years, and one that is much sort after by collectors is the less well-known Pippa doll by Palitoy. I'd never heard of Pippa until I met Mrs Toy Polloi and discovered she and her sisters had more of these than any other doll growing up. And because of Mrs. TP, I am now collecting a few of them myself.



Pippa dolls were produced by Palitoy here in the UK and available from 1972 until 1980, sold as the "pocket-sized" fashion doll. Unlike other dolls

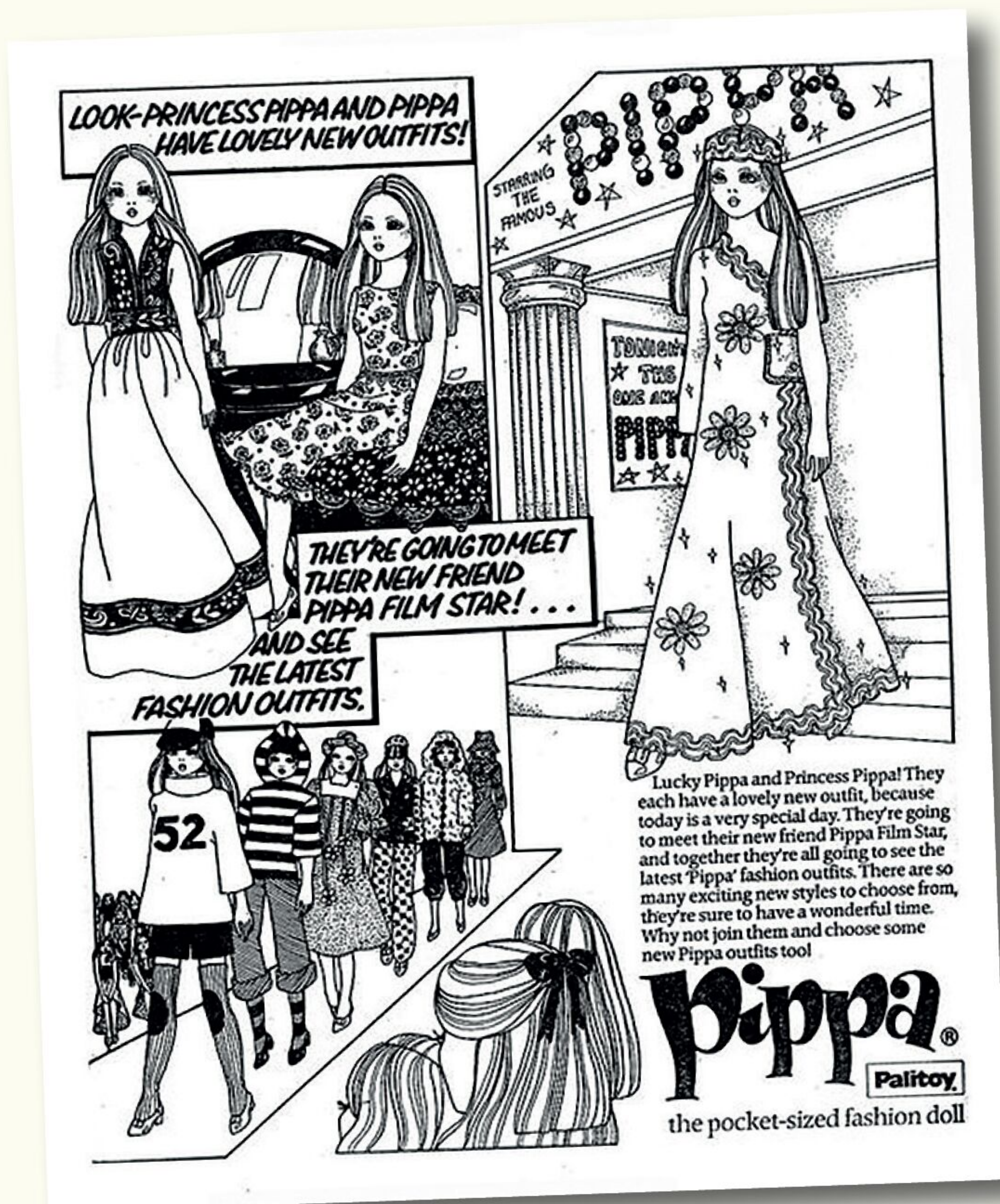
of the time, Pippa stood at only 6.5 inches tall to help keep production costs down. However, she still managed to have the same if not better articulation than the larger dolls on the market with movable arms, head and waist, legs with knee joints, and a built-in walking feature where moving one leg caused the other to move in the opposite direction in a robotic

walking action. Pretty clever for the time and the scale of the doll.

Mrs. Toy Polloi has told me many stories from childhood of playing with her sisters and their collection of Pippa dolls. They spent many an afternoon sewing new outfits for them from fabric scraps and building houses out of cardboard boxes. I used to do just the same but with my Action Man dolls.

The toy line was named after the main doll, Pippa. But she was not the only figure produced as she had many friends, including Jasmine, Gail, Tammie, Marie, Britt, Emma, Rosemary, Penny, Mandy, and not forgetting her boyfriend, Pete. Palitoy created over 30 different 'Pippa and Friends' variants using only three different head moulds by altering the hairstyles, skin tones, and outfits. It's great to see a reflection of the times in these dolls to show the growing diversity in British culture with the inclusion of Jasmine, who was Asian, and Pippa's black friend, Mandy.

As well as the dolls, there was a large selection of outfits, playsets, and accessories to be collected. These included a Gymkhana Set with jumps, rails, a gate, hedges, and a horse for Pippa to ride. An apartment for Pippa to entertain her friends inside was also available, along with a Camper Set with a bright pink Ranger Rover. Various outfits were released, with some having their own collection names and themes, like the Kings Road Collection or the Athens Collection. It would have been tough to collect them all.





MAIL AWAY PETALS

On the back of the dolls' boxes, a daisy was printed with twelve petals, ten of which were empty for you to fill in. You could get more petals by purchasing other Pippa outfits and cutting the petals from these boxes. If you saved seven petals, you could send them off in the post for a free outfit. If you managed to save up all twelve petals, you could get a new doll with an outfit. Boxed outfits for Pippa came with two petals on the back of the box, but it was worth checking under the outfit as sometimes an extra petal was hidden there.

PETE – PIPPA'S ANSWER TO BARBIE'S KEN?

Like any good doll toy line, it couldn't just be about the girls, so Pippa had her boyfriend, Pete. Pete is odd to me as he looks much more childlike than Pippa and is a much simpler doll with even less articulation. He also got his own range of outfits, but they were far fewer in number compared to Pippa.

COLLECTING

Sold at the time as "Pocket Money" dolls, this is no longer the case, with them being increasingly sought after by collectors. Boxed dolls now value well into the hundreds of pounds, with loose ones still fetching a fair amount. I've yet to delve fully into collecting them, but I have managed to pick up an excellent selection of loose dolls so far and even found the odd bargain at local flea markets. As they aren't as well known as dolls like Cindy and Barbie, some sellers don't realise the hidden gems they have.

Like many toys, there are things to watch

out for when collecting them. The hair has often been cut short at some point, the shoes and accessories are very tiny, so they are easily lost, and it's always worth checking under the clothes to see if there is any damage to the doll and if the walking feature still functions.

MECCANO PIPPA

With the success of Pippa in the UK, Meccano released a small amount of dolls in the French market. There are some subtle differences in the toys released there, with the pin-jointed knees updated to have the hidden ratcheted knees that some Sindys and Barbies had. Pete also had a name change and was known as Yan. ■

toy-polloi



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MORE DETAILS COMING SOON

FUSION



Game : Terminator 2: Judgement Day

Year : 1993

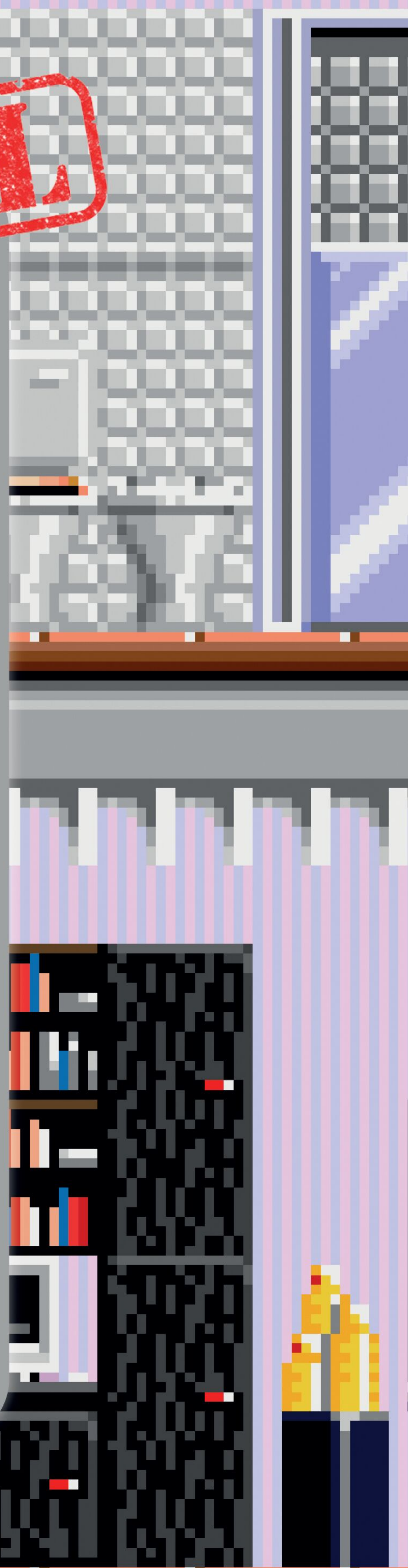
System : Mega Drive, SNES

Words : Faith Johnson

■ I remember being a kid when I saw Terminator 2: Judgement Day on video and being absolutely blown away by the characters, story, and fantastic visual effects that played out over two hours of non-stop action. Who can forget those classic moments of the T-800 taking on the T-1000 in a dual of cyborgs? You can imagine my excitement when I saw a new scrolling action game based on the movie and that iconic image of the Terminator on his motorcycle on the front cover.

However, it quickly became evident that this game wouldn't live up to the hype I felt when I took it home from the video rental shop. From the moment I saw the horribly drawn model of the T-800 sludge his way down the stairs to the bar, I knew this wouldn't be the nail-biting spectacle I had imagined. Tapping the attack button, I saw the Terminator's hands wobble forward in the most awkward way. The graphics and animations are awful, the controls are just sloppy, and it feels more like a Spectrum shovelware title than a blockbuster movie license extravaganza. You struggle as the hit detection fails to acknowledge that you're trying to punch what looks like a biker. It gets worse as the music plods along, sounding like a pong machine clone, as the dreary gameplay repeats itself. Repeatedly.

There seemed to be a chance things may improve when I entered the overhead driving level. But even chugging that Harley or driving a police car cannot save you from the dire lack of fun playing out in front of you. As I sat there all weekend, forcing my way through it to not waste my pocket money, I knew I should have rented the light gun arcade conversion instead. It's one of the worst video games I've ever played and can consider itself TERMINATED! ■





BADASS BOSSSES

GEORGE STURGEON COMBINES THE EFFORTS OF MARIO, LUIGI, AND BOWSER TO BATTLE A BADASS FIRST BOSS, TELLING US WHY THE SEA PIPE STATUE FROM *MARIO & LUIGI: BOWSER'S INSIDE STORY* IS A HIDDEN GEM.

■ The Sea Pipe Statue is a fountain built to honour a legendary hero of the sea. Originally a harmless water feature that resides on Plack Beach, it has been magically enchanted by the returning villain, Fawful, to impede our heroes' progress. With extendable cannon-like pipe arms and the figure of a Stone Blooper, this statue suddenly springs to life and provides the player with their first real challenge.

As the third entry into the *Mario & Luigi* series, *'Bowser's Inside Story'* became (and remains) both a beloved RPG and the series best-seller, most likely due to the multitude of quality boss battles that await the player. The Sea Pipe Statue earns its position as a Badass First Boss due to the inventive approach needed by the player to secure victory. Following a ridiculous turn of events (albeit ridiculously clever), Bowser unknowingly inhales Mario and Luigi, meaning

Below: The sandy beach setting is beautiful, but don't get distracted. Remember to keep an eye on the trajectory of the Sea Pipe Statue's attacks.





Boss: Sea Pipe Statue
Stage: Plack Beach
Dev: AlphaDream
System: Nintendo DS, 3DS
Year: 2009, 2019



Above: Bowser readies for a counter-attack.



Above: Mario & Luigi perform the Green Shell Bros. Attack.



Above: Successfully inhale the Stone Blooper, and the Super Mario Bros. will join the fight from inside of Bowser's body!

they now reside deep within his body. With this bizarre concept comes a battle and a control set-up that allows the player to have command of all three characters.

The battle against the Sea Pipe Statue occurs as Bowser explores Plack Beach whilst trying to find a way back to his castle. He is stopped en route by the villain Fawful, who leaves an enchanted fountain statue to hinder Bowser's progress. As Fawful flees the scene, the player must combine the forces of two superstar heroes and a giant fire-breathing Koopa to take down this furious fountain foe. Battling this boss marks the first time that the player must use all three playable heroes in a single battle and will test each of their basic abilities to the max. With a masterful showcase of strategy and battle flow, the Sea Pipe Statue is tremendously inventive and immediately makes a great first impression.



BOSS BATTLE DESIGN

The confrontation with the Sea Pipe Statue takes place on the sandy shores of Plack Beach. It is a two-dimensional turn-based boss battle where the player selects their attack methods using the returning 'Action Command' system (via the in-game menus) and executes timing-focused moves through button combos. It's a well-tested format and feels familiar from the start.

The battle begins with the head of the fountain, Stone Blooper, detaching itself from the main structure before leaping into one of the green pipes and firing itself toward Bowser like a cannon. This event is the player's cue to demonstrate that they can deflect attacks with Bowser's punches. If executed successfully, the Stone Blooper is sent reeling back into the statue, delivering damage, before it finds its way back to its original position, readying itself for the next attack.

Despite Bowser's strength, attempting to punch the statue directly will prove futile, so the player must look for another way to knock the Stone Blooper figurehead from its perch. Luckily, Bowser has a Vacuum Block, allowing him to inhale items and enemies nearby.



Above: The Vacuum Block will allow Bowser to get the upper hand during this fight.



Above: Bowser ejects the Stone Blooper from his body, making quite an impact.





Successfully inhaling the Stone Blooper by rapidly pressing the assigned button will signal the biggest twist to the battle thus far, with the focus suddenly shifting from an outside view of Bowser to his insides, where Mario and Luigi reside, ready to dish out the next barrage of attacks.

With the Stone Blooper swallowed, the brothers can now attack the boss head-on with acrobatic jumping manoeuvres, Hammer strikes, or a cooperative 'Bros. Attack' that kicks a Green Shell between the duo and their enemy. The latter is one of the player's most effective moves to combat the Sea Pipe Statue and feels incredibly satisfying when executed perfectly.

Attacks from the Stone Blooper will come in various forms, such as bouncing toward the brothers and attempting to drop directly onto them or launching into them like a projectile. Both moves will test the player's defensive abilities and require skilled use of the Hammers to knock their opponent away at just the right moment. One of the boss' most devious attacks occurs when the Stone Blooper turns upside down and lodges itself inside Bowser's body before spinning rapidly, chipping away at Bowser's health. This attack was used more frequently in the original Nintendo DS version, and the 3DS remake appears to reserve this move as a penalty to the player if they aren't applying enough damage. This change adds an incentive to master battle moves before progressing.

Landing enough successful strikes as Mario & Luigi will enrage the boss, who once again launches itself into the duo. Another successful counterattack will push the Stone Blooper out of Bowser's body and back inside the statue. From here, the player resumes control of Bowser, who can finally attack the boss directly. In this vulnerable state, Bowser can strike for several turns without retaliation until the Stone Blooper dislodges itself from its awkward position. The player now has an opportunity to use the boss as Bowser's punch bag freely. Master the timing on Bowser's punches for an 'Excellent!' rating, and you'll be able to hit hard and end the fight fast.

The Sea Pipe Statue has all the qualities of a fun, well-thought-out first boss, and its unique battle strategy offers a perfect test of skill at every turn. Although unassuming in its outward appearance, in terms of technical ability, the Sea Pipe Statue proves its worth as a monumentally fantastic design for a first boss. ■

Thanks to Mario Wiki for the help with images for this article - <https://mario.fandom.com/wiki/MarioWiki>

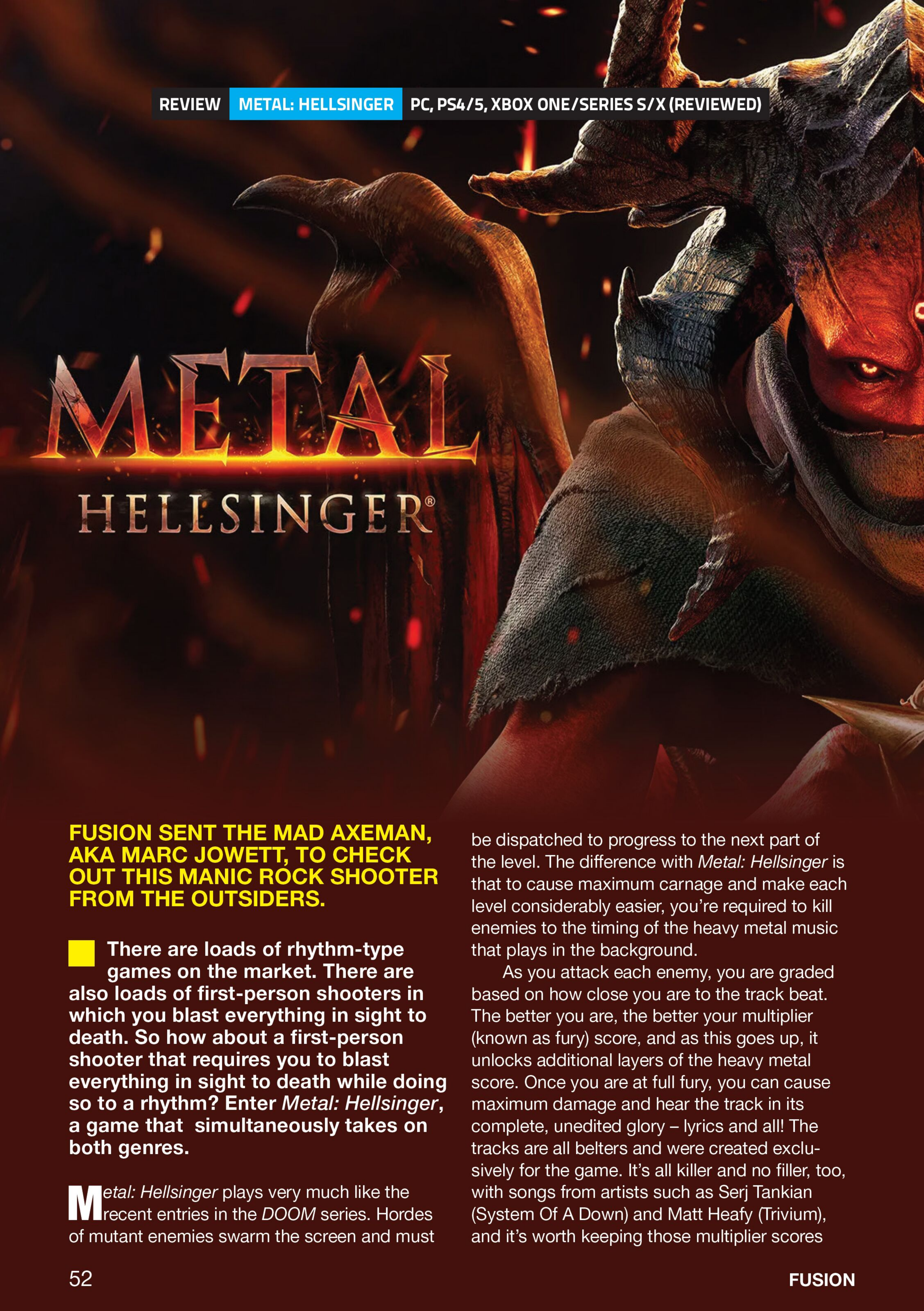


Above: The Stone Blooper launches itself at Mario and Luigi.



Above: A tradition for boss battles in the series, The Sea Pipe Statue erupts into a colourful explosion of stars upon defeat!





METAL HELLSINGER®

FUSION SENT THE MAD AXEMAN, AKA MARC JOWETT, TO CHECK OUT THIS MANIC ROCK SHOOTER FROM THE OUTSIDERS.

■ There are loads of rhythm-type games on the market. There are also loads of first-person shooters in which you blast everything in sight to death. So how about a first-person shooter that requires you to blast everything in sight to death while doing so to a rhythm? Enter *Metal: Hellsinger*, a game that simultaneously takes on both genres.

M*etal: Hellsinger* plays very much like the recent entries in the *DOOM* series. Hordes of mutant enemies swarm the screen and must

be dispatched to progress to the next part of the level. The difference with *Metal: Hellsinger* is that to cause maximum carnage and make each level considerably easier, you're required to kill enemies to the timing of the heavy metal music that plays in the background.

As you attack each enemy, you are graded based on how close you are to the track beat. The better you are, the better your multiplier (known as fury) score, and as this goes up, it unlocks additional layers of the heavy metal score. Once you are at full fury, you can cause maximum damage and hear the track in its complete, unedited glory – lyrics and all! The tracks are all belters and were created exclusively for the game. It's all killer and no filler, too, with songs from artists such as Serj Tankian (System Of A Down) and Matt Heafy (Trivium), and it's worth keeping those multiplier scores



up at the top end just to headbang along to the entire track. These artists are precisely the right type needed for the game, and if they released the soundtrack on its own, it would make a very decent album.

It isn't just enemies that require timing to the beat – practically everything does. Breaking the terrain around you is also done this way, as is reloading your weapon, *Gears Of War*-style. Reloading is an act of precision in its own right to keep the multiplier up in between shooting

things. There is no time limit within the levels themselves, but the multiplier does need to be maintained, and this gets harder the higher it is. In addition, the higher it is, the faster your special attack bar fills, allowing you to unleash deadly attacks that differ depending on the weapon equipped at the time.

Most of the enemies glow along to the beat to aid you in dispatching them, although once the entire screen is awash with them, it can be difficult to keep track. Your success in the game



will therefore also come down to how good you are with musical rhythm. Due to my mum being in the world of music and dance, I have a keen ear for rhythm, which helped me no end. In the same ilk as *DOOM*, certain enemies will come to a standstill and allow you to perform a special fatality on them. How thoughtful of them.

Thankfully, if you are struggling with the game, there are ways to make it easier. You can slide the difficulty up and down as you see fit, and once you have completed every world, you get a set of additional challenges called Torment. Completing these will unlock something called a sigil (a symbol with magical powers), making the game more manageable as you attempt to beat those high scores. Want to protect your beat score? Handily, there's a sigil for that.

There are a total of eight worlds to conquer, and while there are plenty of enemies to keep you occupied in each world, both the levels and

the enemies do start to feel very familiar after a while, and that's perhaps due to the limitation of using rhythm to kill things. The gameplay is as fluid as you would expect it to be for a game this manic, and the graphics are also lovely, with plenty of light effects as you go about your killing spree. Enemy AI is also clever, and some of the more advanced mutants will test your mettle (see what I did there?) as they come at you from multiple angles. There are mutants with shields, for example, that can mess up the beat score if you don't find ways to pound them quickly.

Metal: Hellsinger doesn't feature the greatest lineup of weapons you will ever see, with just two weapons available at the start and a further four to unlock, but they vary nicely in how they damage enemies. For example, one of your starting weapons is a talking skull called Paz that shoots fireballs. He isn't very powerful, and most will dismiss him as the game progresses,





but you can actually fire him at anything – as long as you keep to the beat, it keeps your fury level up, meaning he comes in handy for those quieter parts of levels or if you take a wrong turn. Alongside Paz are the typical weapons you would expect: shotguns, pistols, a sword, and a crossbow. However, I have to admit I preferred to use the weapons found earlier in the game over the later ones for my loadout.

All in all, *Metal: Hellsinger* is a brave attempt to mix rhythm and action and works as a

concept thanks to a belting soundtrack that keeps you entertained as you aim for a high score. It won't appeal to everyone, and first-person shooter purists will probably hate the rhythm element, but it is addictive, and there is real potential for this game to become part of a memorable series. ■



FUSION REACTOR

A MONTH IN THE LIFE OF GAMING.

THE FUSION TEAM

FROM THE DAWN OF TIME THEY CAME; MOVING LOUDLY THROUGH THE GENERATIONS, STRUGGLING TO REACH THE TIME OF GAMING.



Faith Johnson:

My month's highlight was definitely ZZAP! Live, where I spent time with

FUSION colleagues and some amazing guests. Being part of such an excellent event has filled me with community spirit, and I may sound like a broken record by saying the best part of the UK scene is all the wonderful events put on by hardworking folk. I've also enjoyed playing lots of SHMUP titles on Steam this month. Bitwave Games has released the next batch of Toaplan arcade games, and each one has been beautifully ported with many modern features added. Long live PEW! PEW!



Andrew Oyston:

What a month for fans of first-person shooters! *Rise of the Triad: Ludicrous*

Edition delivers a definitive period experience with highs and lows. The recent addition of *Serious Sam: Siberian Mayhem* to Game Pass proved a pleasant surprise. It's been too long, Sam, too long. And then, just for a giggle, Bethesda dropped *Quake II*. It's another period piece, and it's still a fun, if punishing experience, and should tide me over before switching to the gentile joys of *Starfield* in September. Well, gentile compared to these gunfests.



Paul Twist:

As I write this, the sun may be blazing outside, but it's been a fairly tepid month

for games. The main new title I played this month was the entertaining *Double Dragon Gaiden: Rise of the Dragons* (see my review in this issue). The indie games we're sent to review on fusionr-gamer.com continue to offer pleasant surprises,

The Empire Strikes Back™	
1. MH+	7,524,906
2. GPT	1,000,000
3. EMC	900,000
4. PTO	800,000
5. VIK	700,000
6. VIK	600,000

Above: Nobody at the ZZAP! Live event managed to beat Melanie Honebone's high score on the Arcade 1UP Star Wars pinball table [Savage - Ed].

with the dodge/crash 'em-up take on *Asteroids*, *Hyper Meteor*, being this month's highlight. Regarding game news, I was pleased to see the Dimension Shellshock DLC for *TMNT: Shredder's Revenge* get a release date, not to mention another new playable character in the form of Karai. Sticking with my beloved heroes in a half-shell, further details about the video game adaptation of the Last Ronin graphic novel emerged, and this game continues to intrigue me.



Andrew Fisher:

With my operation delayed a week and then cancelled on the day (after waiting nine hours), life got disrupted a lot. It meant missing the ZZAP! Live event, which was a real shame. Gaming time after that hassle was mostly on the *CrossOver: Roll For Initiative* preview and some great new C64 titles. I also found time to check out the pinball game *Xeno Tilt* as it entered Early Access, and work on the book project due in early 2024.



Alan Hammerton:

The last month has been all about the ZZAP! Live event that took place on the 12th of August in Kenilworth. The sheer amount

COLD

PARTIAL REACTIVITY

NEUTRON FLUX

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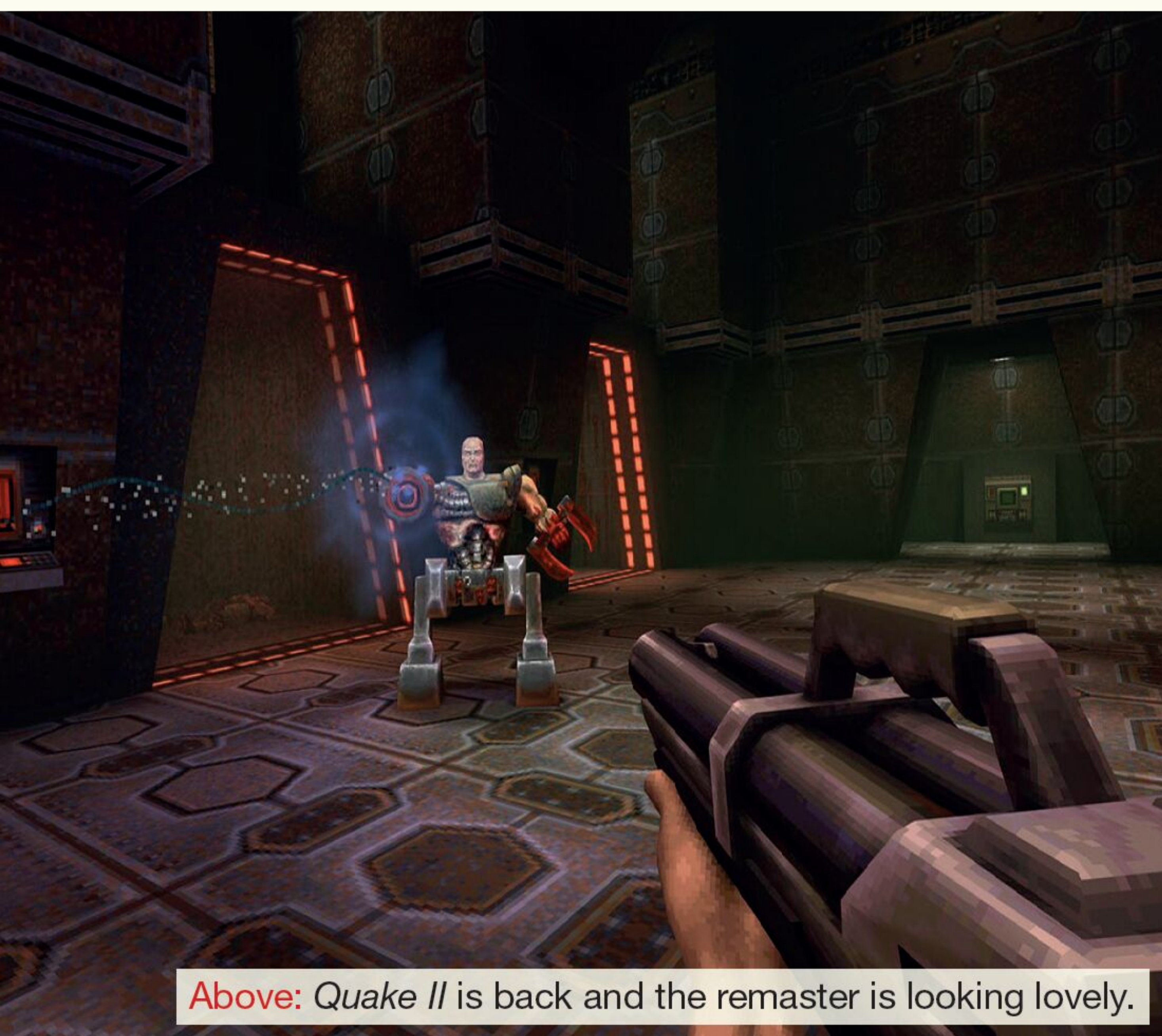
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Above: *Quake II* is back and the remaster is looking lovely.

of work that went into getting the machines ready is just crazy. Many people whose systems were there for the public to play on had spent weeks ensuring they were prepared. Typically, though, machines still fail, my own C128 included. Ah well, now the event is over, I can spend time fixing it ready for next year. Game-wise, I fell in love with the *Star Wars* pinball table (and so did many others; it was rarely unoccupied). I'm just trying to justify buying one, though don't tell my other half.



George Sturgeon:

My month in video games has had a very retro theme. I've decided to return to *Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story* and *Wario Land IV* to see if they were as good as I recall. So far, the decision to return to these games seems to have been a good one, bringing back memories of bizarre bosses and reminding me just how clever Nintendo's game design can be. Always on the lookout for vibrant platformers, I also purchased *New Super Lucky's Tale* on the PlayStation 4. There are plenty of nods to other iconic platformers throughout, which has been

fantastic to see. Movie and TV-wise, I've finally caught up on Season 3 of *The Witcher*. With Henry Cavill's exit from the show set for Season 4, I think he'd be an excellent choice for the next James Bond.



Toy Polloi:

For me, it doesn't matter how rare or valuable a toy is. If it's broken, I want to get in there and fix it. This month, I have spent many hours repairing some vintage Generation One Transformers that most people wouldn't take a second look at. With a little time and attention, these toys are back up and running. One person's trash is another's treasure.



Zoë Kirk-Robinson:

Having finally paid off the Raccoon Mob in *Animal Crossing*, I have now ventured into the crazy world of *Katamari Damacy*. The Switch remake is a wonderfully oddball experience, but the King of All Cosmos has to be gaming's worst father. What an utter git! Still, talking to him is a better experience than most of the asshats in *Oblivion* have been giving me! Although, that might have something to do with the amount of fireballs heading their way.

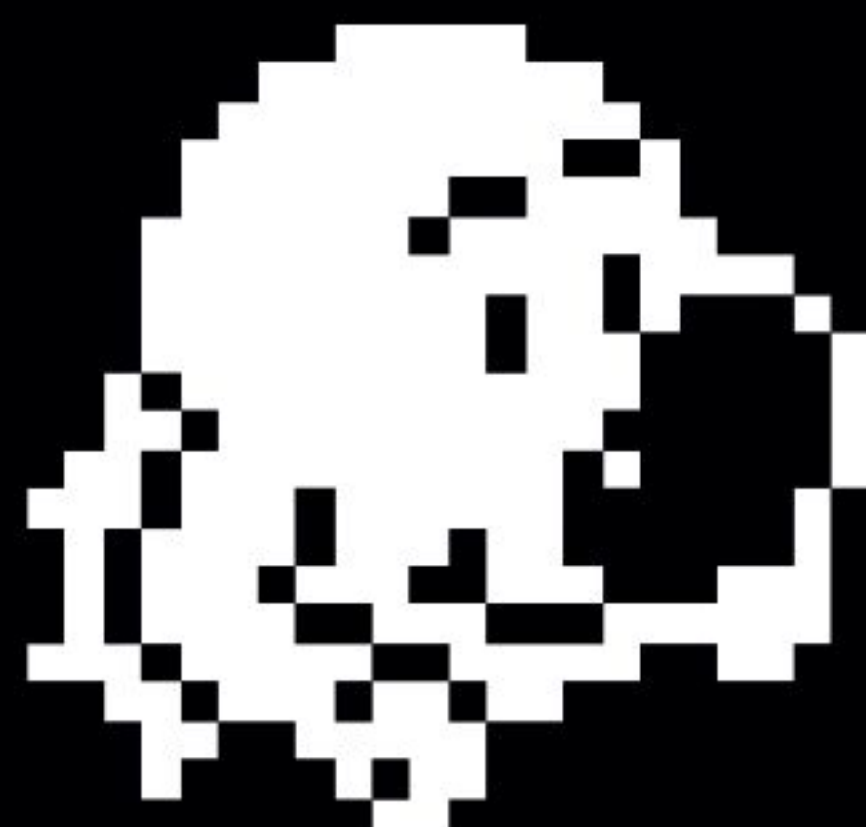
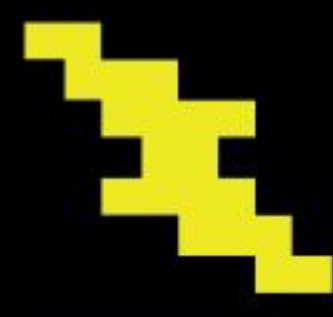
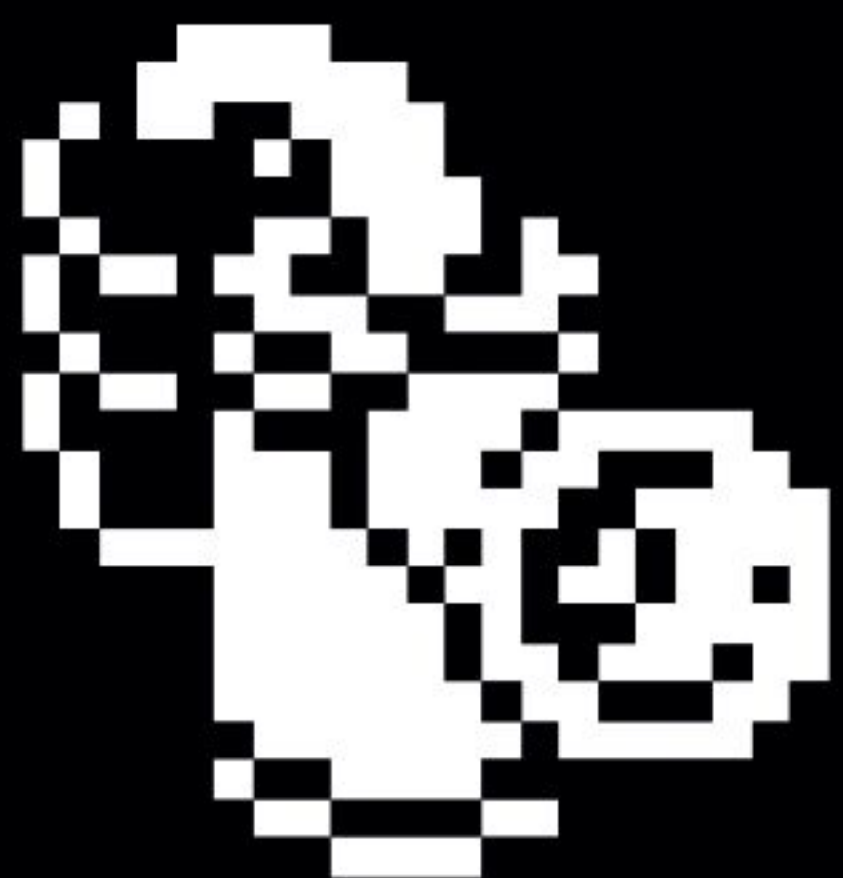
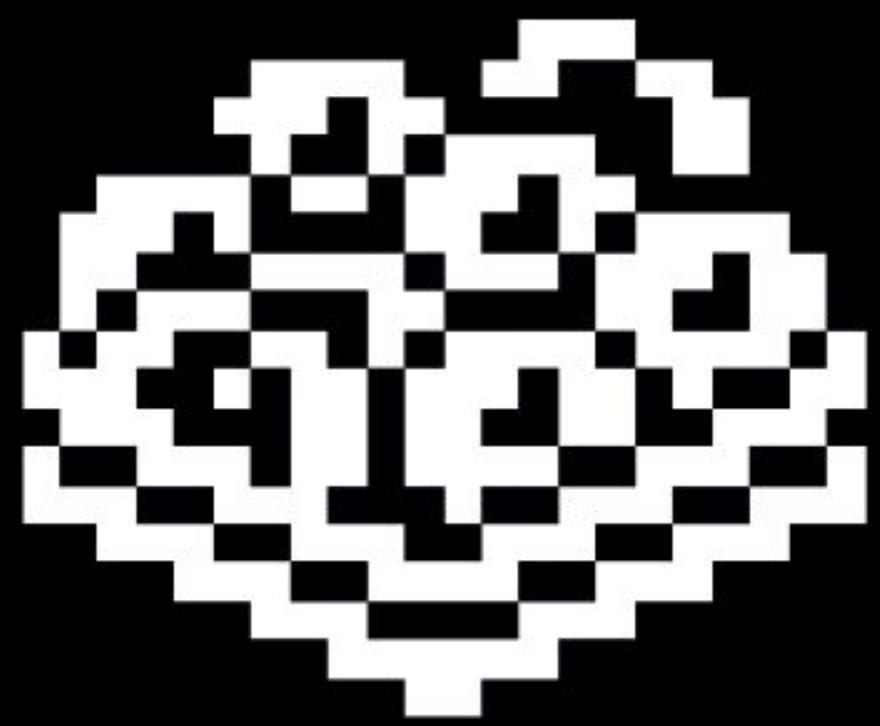


Ben Honebone:

I really enjoyed catching up with everyone at the ZZAP! event, and it was a pleasure to see it all go off without a hitch. Setting up a bunch of Commodores was heresy, of course, but I did it for the greater good, and I'm sure the AmtixCPC crew can forgive me. I haven't found much time for gaming recently, and when I do, it's (you guessed it) *Street Fighter VI* and *Resident Evil Village* that are getting most of my attention. But, with *Starfield* and *Alan Wake II* on the way, not to mention this year's #CPC RetroDev and N64brew Game Jam competitions - I'll have to make more time somehow. ■

THAT MOMENT

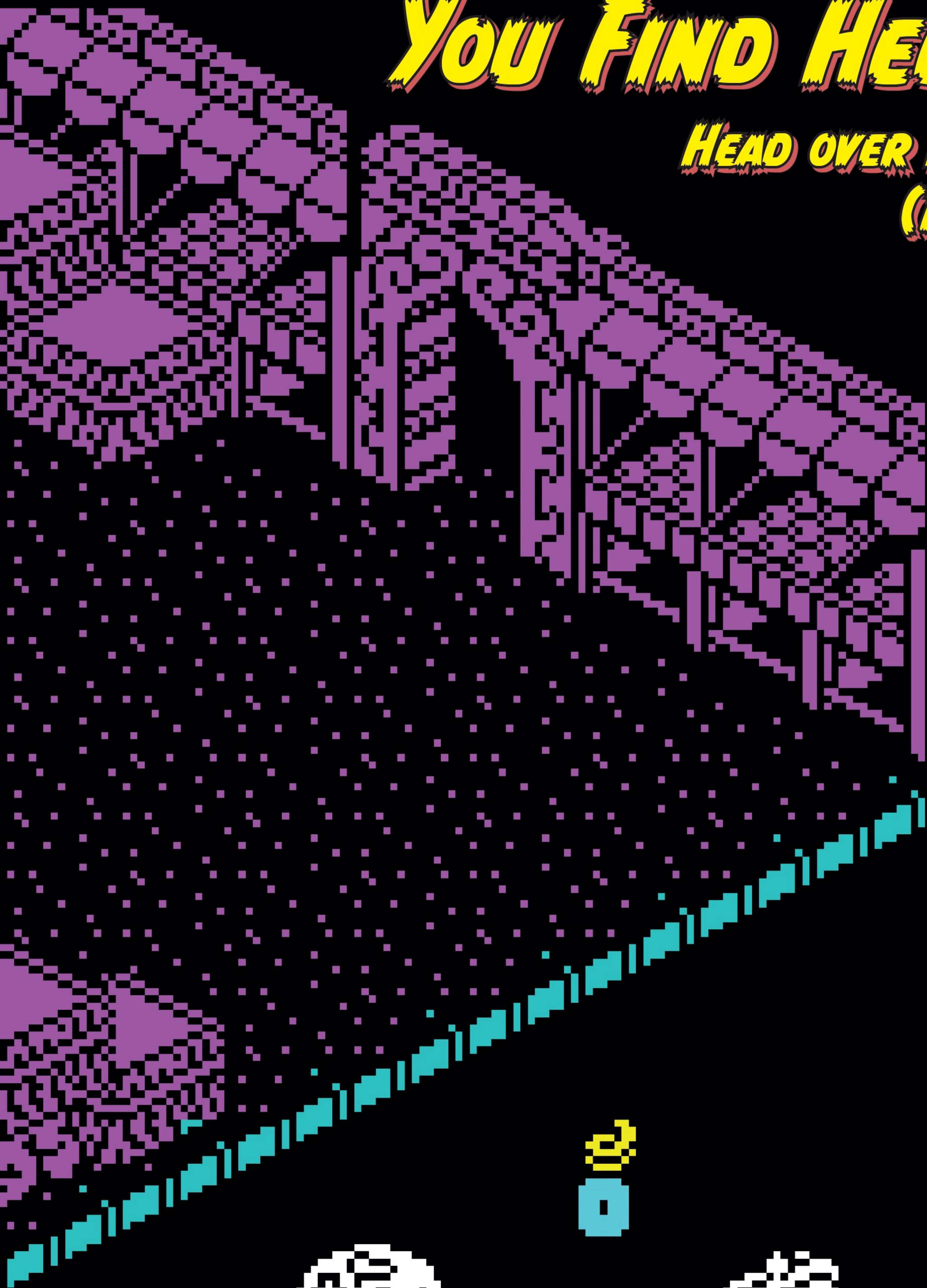
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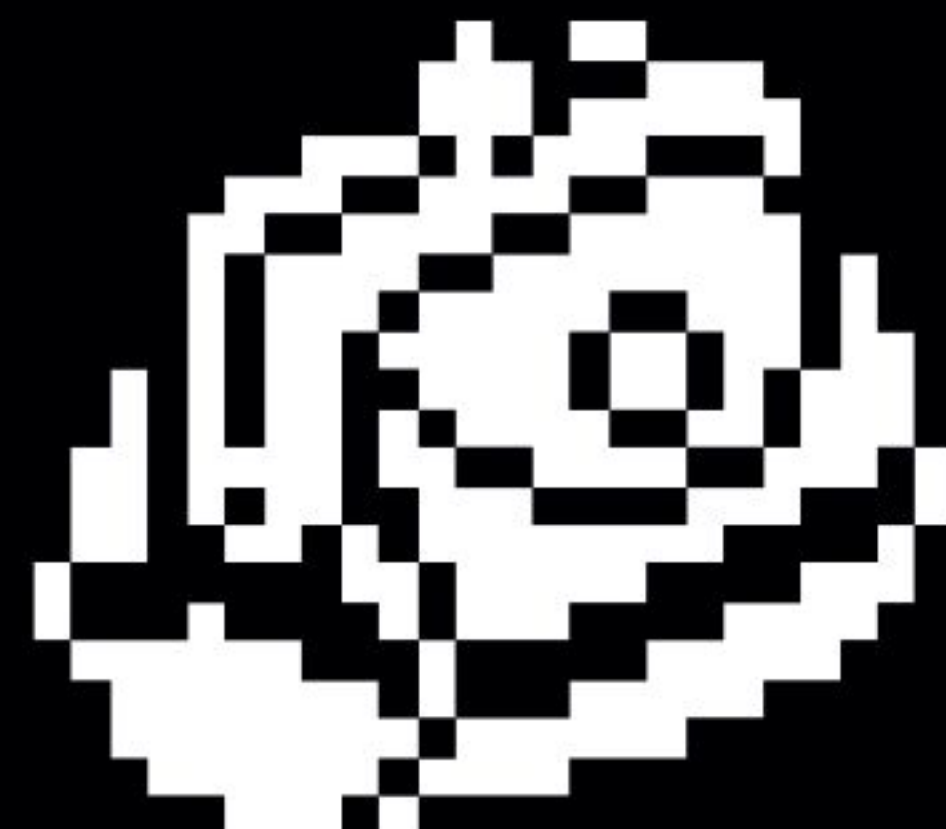
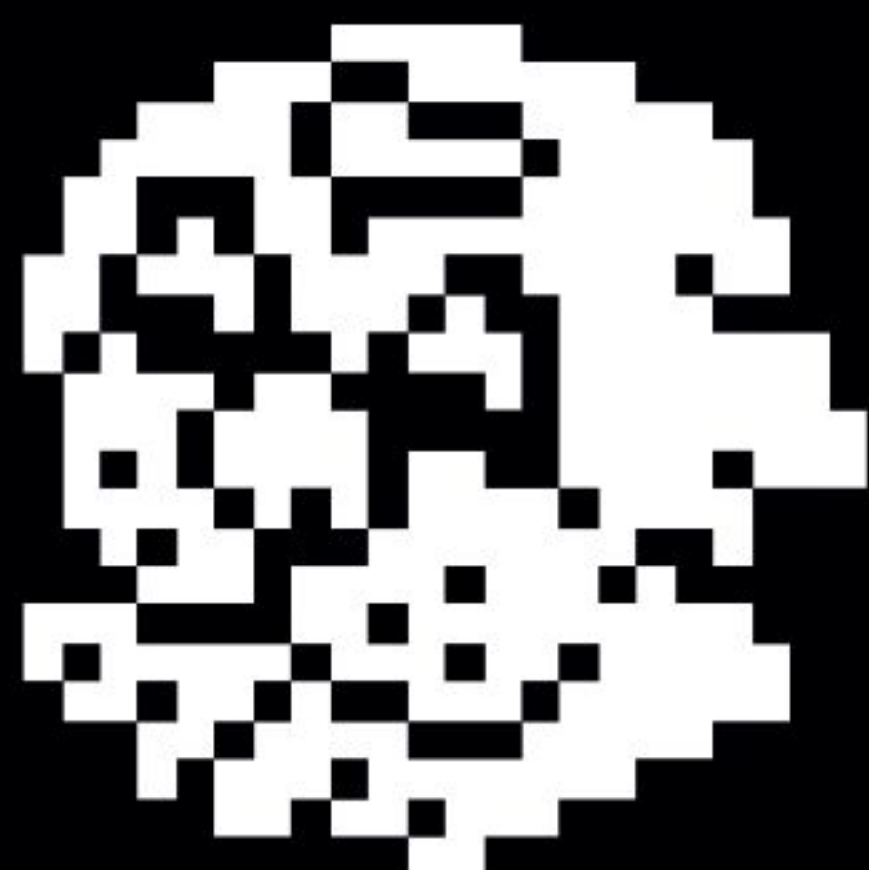
Screenshot by Moby Games.

You FIND HEELS

HEAD OVER HEELS
(1987)



7





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